

THE LONDON READER

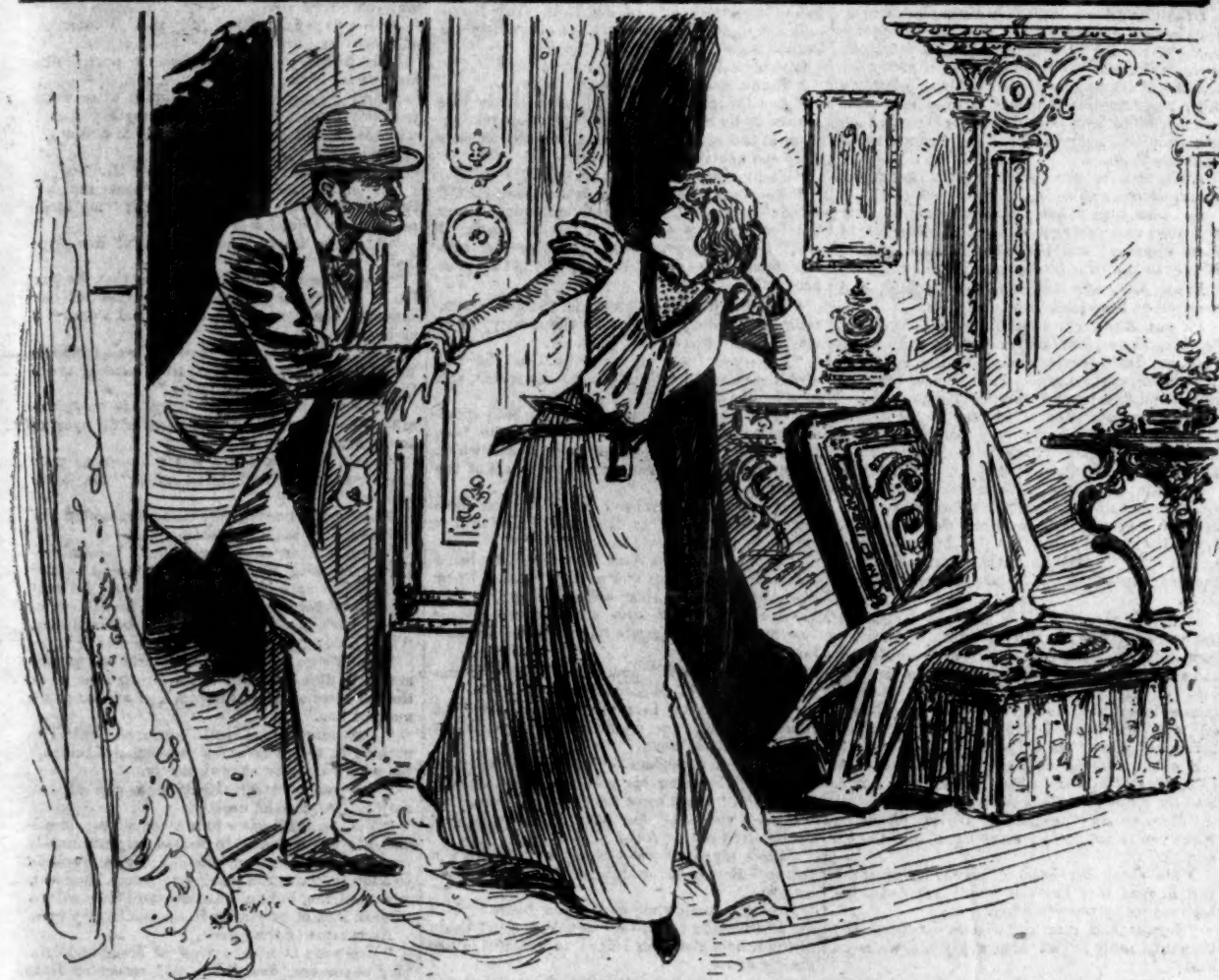
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"NOT A WORD!" HACKETT HISSER, "IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE!"

A DISHONOURED NAME.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"This horrible sum! I've done it five times, and it won't come right," exclaimed a girl of about ten, peevishly, and looking very much inclined to cry. "What's the good of arithmetic! I'm sure I think it's nothing but a bore."

"Yes, a beastly bore," chimed in her young brother, aged eight. "I like drawing engines, and ships, and trains, but sums is beastly," he concluded, emphatically, without any regard to grammar or elegance of speech.

"Bertie, dear, what a vulgar word to use," said a pale, weary-looking girl of about twenty, lifting her head from the exercise she was cor-

recting, and looking at him reproachfully; "where did you hear it?"

"Jimmy Brown says it, and lots of other words besides; he told me he was going to nick some of the geraniums out of the little front gardens, and wants me to help him."

"To nick them!" repeated his sister, puzzled. "Yes, steal them, don't you know," the boy exclaimed, triumphantly.

"Oh! Bertie, how wicked! You must never go with Jimmy Brown again. Why, dear, do you not understand that stealing is very wrong? If you were to take the plants you would be put in prison. Promise me you will have nothing more to do with such a naughty boy."

"Why, Alida!" he exclaimed, somewhat crestfallen at her reproof. "Jimmy says there's nothing wrong about it if we don't get found out."

"Jimmy is a worse boy than I thought he was; indeed, dear, he is no fit companion for you. Promise me you will not speak to him again."

"Only once, Alida," pleaded the boy; "let me speak to him once, and I will tell him what you say."

"Very well, Bertie," she said, quietly. "I know you will keep your promise. You may speak to him once, to tell him you will have nothing more to do with him. Now, Grace," turning to the younger girl, "let me see if we cannot conquer this stubborn sum together."

In a very short space of time the faulty addition was set right, and Bertie's spelling-lesson was heard.

"That will do for to-day, children," Alida said, somewhat wearily, "my head aches with the heat. As mother is out, shall we go for a walk?"

"Oh! yes, yes!" chorused both children, eagerly; "you don't often come with us."

"Because I have not much time, dear; however, run away now, and put on your hats while I tidy up the room."

A hard life indeed was Alida Palafret's, very different from what she had been accustomed to

in her youth, yet a word of complaint never passed her lips.

The only child of rich parents, everything that money could purchase or affection lavish had been hers during her early childhood, but her mother died suddenly, and from that time everything seemed to have gone wrong with the Palaires.

Her father cared for nothing, let everything go from bad to worse, and finally married a woman much below him in station.

Even this did not arrest his downward course. He changed his name and lived in hiding for some years, and then a terrible blow fell upon them, which was worse than all that had gone before. This was shortly followed by her father's death; and terrible as it may seem to say so, it was a relief to both wife and daughter that he was snatched away before more disgrace could fall upon them.

Alida rose to the occasion with wonderful courage for one so young.

She persuaded her stepmother to resume their rightful name, and remove far from the scene of their disgrace; and the elder woman yielded blindly to the girl's stronger will.

It was Alida who took the poor lodgings, and managed to keep them neat and clean.

It was Alida who taught her half-sister and brother, who cooked and mended for them, who eked out their scanty income by teaching the tradesmen's dull daughters the difference between sharp and flat; and it was Alida who kept her stepmother from depending, and urged her to get work, for she was a very fair dressmaker, having been in one of the large London warehouses before Mr. Palairé saw and married her.

With it all Alida never uttered a murmur against her hard fate; but the colour faded from her face, the roundness from her cheek, and the light from her eyes, leaving her pale and fragile-looking, though nothing could destroy the clear contour of her features or her grace of form.

If during the oppressive heat she longed for the cool sea breezes or the soft green of feathery fern and waving grass, the murmur of brooklets, the song of feathered tribes free as the air, not caged in tiny prisons, or the drowsy, soothing hum of insect life, she kept her longings to herself, and bravely trod the path that stretched before her, strewn with thorns though it was.

She had hardly finished putting away the tattered school-books when the children burst into the room with their shabby hats on.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Bertie, jocosely; "but you're not ready; make haste, do, there's a brick."

Alida shook her head at him as he squeezed and hugged her, but she would not damp his high spirits by reproving him.

"Sorrow and care come soon enough," she thought, sadly; "let him enjoy life while he can."

Soon they were out walking on the dusty pavement in the scorching sunshine.

Grace kept soberly along by her sister's side; but Bertie darted hither and thither, regardless of the heat, chasing a solitary white butterfly, which by some mistake had roamed into the narrow, dusty streets in its search for green fields and brilliant flowers.

So absorbed was the child in his chase that he ran into the road after the insect, which fluttered provokingly before him just out of his reach, several times, heedless of Alida's admonitions about his safety.

Just as he thought he had secured the prize a van drawn by two horses was driven sharply round a corner, and before Alida could spring forward to save him, Bertie was down among the horses' feet.

With an agonized cry Alida covered her face with her hands to shut out the horrible sight.

The blood recoiled from her heart, leaving her dizzy and faint.

In a second several thoughts flashed over her. How could she face his mother, and tell her the fate of the bright, beautiful boy she loved so well? How could she return with his mangled, bleeding corpse in place of the healthful, bloom-

ing child? Why had she brought him out only to find his death?

She was suddenly roused from her gloomy forebodings by a strange voice addressing her.

"This has been a severe shock to you, I am afraid; but there is no further cause for alarm. The little fellow is more frightened than hurt, I think."

Alida opened her eyes with a gasp. There, in front of her, stood a gentleman, his light-grey suit splashed and stained with mud from the freshly-watered road, holding in his arms Bertie—Bertie, dragged and dirty, but apparently unharmed.

The revulsion of feeling was great.

"Thank Heaven!" she cried, fervently.

"And the gentleman, too," cried Bertie, who seemed in no hurry to get down from his resting-place in the strong arms which held him as carefully and gently as a woman's.

"The gentleman?" stammered Alida.

"Yes," responded Bertie, rather indignantly.

"Didn't you see, I should have been runned over but for him; he caught the horses' heads. I say," he continued, turning to his rescuer with the familiarity of childhood, "what's your name?"

"Percival Ronayne," answered the gentleman, promptly, smiling down into the pretty, dirty face scanning him so scrutinizingly.

"I like you," the boy announced, at the end of his scrutiny. "Will you be my friend, and may I call you Percy?"

"Most willingly; I answer you to both questions," said Mr. Ronayne, setting him on his feet, when the child, clung tightly to the hand which had rescued him from the trampling hoofs of the horses.

"How can I thank you for what you have done?" said Alida, turning to him with her gratitude plainly visible in her dark eyes.

"Believe me, I am more than repaid by being able to restore him to you unharmed, though I fear his clothes have rather suffered," replied Mr. Ronayne, letting his eyes dwell upon her pale face, and thinking, despite its want of colour, how fair it was.

"So have yours," announced Bertie unconcernedly, "you're all covered with mud!"

"We are rowing in the same boat, then," he returned, gaily, "for, my little friend, you do not look particularly clean."

"I shall go home and get mother to wash me; but I say," lowering his voice and speaking confidentially, "you'll come too?"

"If—it your—?" began Mr. Ronayne, looking doubtfully towards Alida.

"She's my sister; she won't object, she's a trump," Bertie declared, intent upon having his own way.

"Will you allow me to see you home? You are still looking very pale," he asked, courteously of the fragile girl, who looked so graceful in her shabby attire.

"I am afraid you will think Bertie very forward," she said, hesitatingly.

"I think he is a very nice little chap, indeed," he responded, as they turned their way homewards. "Has he not promised to be my friend?"

A promise the child kept by keeping tight hold of his hand the whole way to their humble dwelling, regardless of the pickle he was in.

Here Mr. Ronayne would have left them, but Bertie insisted that his new friend must go in and see his mother, who was certain to be at home now.

Alida looked embarrassed. She could see that the stranger was evidently accustomed to a very different style of living from theirs, and she hardly liked to expose the poverty of their abode.

He saw her hesitation, and guessed the cause.

"Some other time, little one"—this to Bertie. Then to her, "you are safe now, and I will leave you, Miss—"

"Palairé," she said, quietly, little thinking the effect the name would have upon the stranger.

"Palairé," he repeated, astonished, "are you the daughter of—?"

"My father's name was Morton," she said, wondering slightly.

"Morton Palairé, of Dinglethorpe?"

"Yes."

"Then it is the same. You must be the little Alida who used to ride upon my shoulder, let me see, nearly eighteen years ago! I dare say you would not remember me; you were a mere baby then. I went to India, and when I returned several years afterwards all traces of my old friends had vanished. I am glad, indeed, to have met you now."

Alida's face flushed painfully at this mention of her father.

"My father—that is, we became poor," she murmured, low.

"Ah! I heard something about it after your mother's death; but tell me, is my old friend still alive? I have never been able to find out."

"He is dead," she said, slowly.

"Dead!" he ejaculated. "Poor Morton."

"After my mother's death my father married again," she went on, in low tones; "my stepmother is not quite a lady."

"Ah! he interpolated, looking at her pityingly.

"But," she added, quickly, seeing that he was likely to put a wrong interpretation on her speech, "she is very good to me, and I am fond of her."

"Are you coming in?" bawled Bertie from the top of the stairs at this juncture. "Grace, make them come up; mother's home."

Grace was too bashful to obey this imperious order; she only raised big, wondering eyes to the stranger's face.

"I will come in for a few minutes, as your brother seems to wish it so much," the latter said.

Alida made no opposition, but mounted the stairs towards their tiny sitting-room.

"Here mother, this is my friend!" exclaimed Bertie, meeting Mr. Ronayne at the door and pulling him into the room. "I say," he continued, to his new acquaintance, regardless of his mother's horror-struck looks at his audacity, "see's ready; you'll stay and have some!"

"To be sure I will if Mrs. Palairé will permit me," said Ronayne, who felt a strong interest in the daughter of his old friend, and wished to see more of her.

"I'm sure, sir, I feel honoured, but I've nothing fit to put before a gentleman like you," the widow stammered, awkwardly.

"You can give Mr. Ronayne a cup of tea, mother," Alida said, quietly.

"Yes, and I'll give him some of my bread-and-dripping," chimed in Bertie, magnanimously transferring a hunch of the delicacy in question to another plate, and placing it before his guest, who eyed this, to him, unaccustomed fare with a comical look of perplexity in his frank, grey eyes.

Alida came to the rescue.

"Everyone is not so fond of bread-and-dripping as you are, dear," she said, returning it to his plate. "I dare say we can find some butter for Mr. Ronayne."

"Dripping ain't bad," remarked the incorrigible youth with his mouth full; he sometimes forgot his grammar, in spite of the pains Alida took with his education, "it's a deal better nor dry bread."

"I knew your husband very well some years ago, Mrs. Palairé," Ronayne remarked, as he sipped his tea and ate the thin bread-and-butter that Alida had cut for him, and which had elicited from Bertie the remark—

"My, ain't it thin! What a lot of butter is taken."

The widow cast an uneasy glance at her stepdaughter at this remark of their visitor, but said nothing.

"Yes, mother," Alida said, answering her glance with a reassuring look. "Mr. Ronayne knew papa years ago; he carried me on his shoulder when I was two years old."

"Then he didn't—?" Mrs. Palairé commenced, but stopped abruptly.

"He did not see him for years before he died," Alida went on, calmly.

"No, I quite lost sight of him years ago," Mr. Ronayne said. "I was unaware that he had



married again, though I heard something of his having lost his property."

"Ah! yes," the widow said, with a sigh, "that was before he met me."

"But now I trust," the visitor went on, "that you will permit me to take up my old standing as a friend of the family."

"You are very kind, sir," she said somewhat awkwardly, "but—but—"

"Please do not say anything against it," he exclaimed; "here is Bertie willing and anxious to be my friend; surely his mother and sisters will not deny me the same privilege!"

"We cannot, sir, after what you have done for him," his mother said, in an agitated voice.

"Nay, that I would have done for anyone," he returned, quickly, "but as it brings me your friendship I shall always feel grateful to the accident for what it brought me. Bertie," he continued, in a different tone, "what shall I bring you the next time I come to see you?"

"Lollipops," responded that young gentleman tersely.

"Then lollipops it shall be," Mr. Ronayne said. "Good-bye, Mrs. Palaret; I hope you will not think me intrusive if I come again. Good-bye Grace," to the shy girl, who hid behind her elder sister. "Good-bye, Miss Palaret; I suppose I must not call you Alida now," and he went rapidly down the rickety stairs, followed by a shout from Bertie of,—

"Come soon, and mind you don't forget the sweeties."

When the last echoes of his footsteps died away, mother and daughter faced each other with an anxious look.

"He does not know," says Alida, very gravely; "ought we to tell him?"

"No, no!" said the widow, shuddering, "he may be a true friend to us, and who is to tell him? He may never know."

"But if he should?"

"Ah! well," responded her stepmother, mournfully, "we must trust that Providence will not be so cruel to the widow and the fatherless."

CHAPTER II.

AT THE first meeting Percival Ronayne was a constant visitor at the Palarets' humble abode.

Boxes of chocolate and caramels for Bertie and Grace, lovely flowers and superb hothouse fruit for the widow and Alida, arrived in such profusion as to call forth a remonstrance from Mrs. Palaret against such costly extravagance. She had all her life been subject to the pinchings of poverty, and this wealth of floral magnificence was a revelation to her; she had never tasted the luxuries that riches can bring. It was very different with Alida. The lovely gardenias, stephanotis, tuberose, and fairy-like maidenhair seemed like old friends to her, they reminded her of her lost home, where the greenhouses had been filled with them and their compères. She revelled in their beauty and the exquisite fragrance of their scent, but at the same time their familiar loveliness brought an unbidden pang to her heart; ended for her were all the beauties of life, only the sordid commonplace remained. Almost unconsciously she could not help wishing that she could return to her former state of luxury and ease, and be done for ever with the curking cares of poverty.

Not for herself only did she wish this; but also for her stepmother and her children.

Gradually she came to look eagerly forward to Percival Ronayne's visits.

He bought her books as well as flowers; he seemed to link her with her old life before poverty and disgrace had laid their fell hands upon her. More eagerly even than Bertie—who was a perfect cormorant for everything in the shape of fruit and sweets—did she watch for the sound of his familiar footstep on the rickety stairs, and long, indeed, the day seemed when she caught no glimpse of his erect figure and frank, good-looking face.

All unknowingly as yet her heart had gone out into the keeping of this brave, chivalrous gentleman, whose years numbered twice the amount of

hers, whose thick, brown hair was slightly sprinkled with grey, but whose smile was as sweet, whose manner was as tender as a woman's, to anything young, and weak, and helpless.

And Percival Ronayne! As the summer days passed, he knew that love had come to him too; henceforth for him there would be but one woman in the world—his old friend's daughter, Alida Palaret.

He quickly made up his mind—he would ask her to be his own wife.

He had no kith or kin near enough to interfere with him; he was his own master and exceedingly well off, and what mattered it that Alida was poor. Her birth was as good as his own.

He was proud, the race of Ronayne had ever been so—proud of the bravery and honour of its men, of the stainless purity of its women. He would not have cared to stoop to a *mésalliance*; but Alida, though living in poverty, was descended on both sides from those of gentle blood. He would woo and win her for his own if he could.

His only hesitation was on the score of his age.

He was forty, she barely twenty. Could a young girl like her feel any real affection for a man so much her senior? he asked himself over and over again doubtfully, but he could not but remark the flush that overspread her pale cheek, and the glad light that flashed into her eyes whenever they met.

Emboldened by these signs in his favour, he determined "to put it to the touch, to win or lose it all," though in the latter case he knew he would have to give up the friendship which was so perilously sweet to him, and go back to the solitary existence which had sufficed him before, but which could never give him the same content since he had set eyes on Alida Palaret.

Tremulously she listened as the burning words fell from the lips of the man who was her hero, her sun-god, and a wild wave of rapture swept over her to know herself beloved.

She did not speak, her happiness was too great for words; she lay passive in his clasp as he drew her nearer and nearer, reading in her silence, in her downcast eyes and rose-flushed cheeks, the answer he so longed to hear.

"My own!" he whispered, in impassioned accents, as he raised her face tenderly from his breast, "look up; let me read in your eyes that you return my love!"

Shyly she obeyed him, lifting her dark orbs to his with a love-light in them, which satisfied even his exalted passion.

"Darling!" he exclaimed, incoherently, "darling, you shall never regret your choice, never regret having blessed me with your love. Your life shall be fair—fair as I can make it; you shall never repent giving yourself to an old man like me."

"Old!" she echoed, softly, smoothing back the hair where it was silvered on his temples with tender, caressing touch. "Old! Why malign yourself so?"

"I am double your age, my darling!"

"What of that? You are young to all the world, especially so to me."

"And you can love me, staid and middle-aged as I am!" he queried, eagerly, gazing at her with his soul in his eyes.

"I should love you, Percy"—how tenderly she dwelt for the first time upon his name!—"I should love you were you double your present age."

He gathered her still closer in his arms, and kissed her upturned face and brow. "Darling, you will give yourself to me soon! I cannot live without my wife," he cried.

"I am yours now and ever," she murmured, low.

"I will take you to the country," he continued fondly. "Away from all this squalid poverty, my darling shall reign as a queen in my ancestral house, one of the fairest chateaux that ever graced it."

His words recalled her to herself from her dream of bliss. "My—my stepmother," she faltered. "I had forgotten I cannot leave her and the children here."

"Nor did I mean that you should do so, Alida," he said, quickly. "Though your step-

mother is very different from the graceful, aristocratic woman you called your daughter, still she is your father's widow, and has been kind to you. In marrying you I do not wish to separate you entirely from her, do not think me such a bear as that," smiling tenderly at her. "There is a pretty little cottage only a mile or two from my place, which I thought would just suit her and Bertie and Grace; it will be much better for the children to live among the green fields than in the smoke of London. Besides, there is a first-rate school near to which Bertie can go, and when you wish you can have them to stay with you as Ronayne Court."

"How good you are to me and mine, Percy!" she said, feelingly, looking with admiration into the bronzed face, which wore so gentle an expression as it gazed at her.

"Pshaw, my darling," he said, laughing. "I cannot do half enough to repay you for giving yourself to me."

In the glamour of her love, Alida forgot everything save the bliss of knowing she was loved; but when Percy had at last torn himself away, and the spell cast by his presence had faded, suddenly there flashed across her with blighting force the remembrance of the disgrace that hung round her father's memory.

"Mother," she cried, suddenly to Mrs. Palaret—and there was a bitter tone in her cry as she knelt beside her stepmother's chair—"mother, am I wronging him in thus letting him marry me unknowing? Would he still love me, still wish me for his bride if he knew all?"

"I—I think so, dear," said her stepmother, soothingly. "You are very pretty Alida, and he loves you so well." She had her own reason for not wishing the match broken off; the thought of the pretty cottage was very alluring to her.

"Yes, mother; but loving me so well, I ought not to deceive him."

"How can you tell him, Alida?" Mrs. Palaret said, sadly, adding, quickly, "besides, he may never know the disgrace does not attach to your name."

"No; that is true," Alida replied, thoughtfully, "besides, it seems a pity to disturb his belief in his old friend, but I do not like deceit. Mother, tell me what I ought to do!"

Mrs. Palaret hesitated; though she had not descended from a long line of ancestors, yet she knew what honour meant. At last she said,—

"I cannot advise you, Alida; do what your heart and conscience thinks best."

"Then I will tell him, mother," Alida returned.

The widow sighed; the vision of the cottage and green fields faded away in the distance, for she thought Percival Ronayne's love would not stand the test, but she would not dissuade her stepdaughter from her decision.

But it was one thing for Alida to make up her mind to confess all to her lover, quite another to put it into execution.

Many times was she on the point of telling him everything, when something stayed her. Perhaps it was from a chance remark of his, or perhaps from her own inward dislike of the task, and fear of what the revelation might cost her; but certain it is that she put it off from day to day as it grew harder and harder, and finally something occurred which seemed to put it totally out of her power to say the fatal words which would separate them.

Percival had insisted upon taking them all down to Ronayne Court to spend the day.

The massive structure, standing in a lovely park with herds of red deer, looked what it was, one of England's stately homes, magnificent and imposing to the eyes which had looked so long upon narrow streets and rows of chimney-stacks.

Mrs. Palaret gazed with an awed look at the grand home which was soon to be her stepdaughter's; Bertie and Grace viewed it with different feelings.

They were wild with delight at the deer, at the huge gold-fish in the ornamental ponds, at the gorgeous peacocks strutting about the lawn with discordant cries, at the brilliant flowers, and last, but not least, at the splendid rows of fruit-

trees in the orchard and kitchen-garden, where they were let loose by their indulgent host with permission to eat as much as they chose, provided they did not make themselves ill, a permission they were not slow to avail themselves of.

After a luncheon, which made Mrs. Palairot's eyes open wider than ever with wonder, and made Bertie regret that he had eaten quite so much fruit and left so little room for the good things provided, Percival drew his promised bride away to show her over the house where she would so soon reign as mistress.

All day Alida had been trying to gain courage to tell her secret, but somehow the words would not come.

He had shown her the principal rooms, and asked her what changes she would like made in them—the armoury, with its grim suits of armour, from the Saracen's coat of mail, brought from the Holy Land by one of his ancestors who had accompanied the lion-hearted king to Palestine, down through all the different epochs of armour, Henry VIII., Elizabethan, Cromwellian, James, to some breast-plates which had been worn on the field of Waterloo. All bore the same testimony to the bravery of the race whose motto, "Death before Dishonour," had been upheld through centuries by men who were prouder of being Ronaynes of Ronayne Court than if they had a dozen titles tacked before their name.

He had shown her all these, and now they were standing in the picture-gallery looking at the portraits of graceful cavaliers and fair dames. Slowly they went from one to another, he telling her the history of each.

She stopped before one, a cavalier in the armour of the time of the unfortunate Charles I., and regarded the pictured face intently.

"Who is that?" she asked, softly. "You resemble him so much."

"You flatter me, darling," he answered, smiling. "That is Roland Ronayne, one of the heroes of our race; he preferred 'Death before Dishonour.' Shall I tell you, darling?"

"Yes," almost inaudibly.

"He was married; there you may see his wife, that beautiful woman with raven locks. Very little more than a year after marriage war broke out, just too when a son and heir had been given him. Duty called him to the bloody field of battle; love and inclination would have kept him by the side of his beautiful wife, yet weak and delicate, but love was cast aside for duty. To her tears and entreaties that he would not go to the wars he answered, in the memorable words:—

"Tell me not, sweet, I am unkind,
That from the memorie
Of thy chaste breast and quiet minde
To warre and arms I fle.

True, a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field,
And with a stronger faith embrace
A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such
As you, too, shall adore;
I could not love thee, deare, so much,
Loved I not honour more.

In his eyes it would have been dishonour to stay at home."

"And he left her!" she asked, in a low voice.

"Yes, my darling; left her young, beautiful, beloved, never to see her more; exchanged the caresses of her white arms for the din and clash, and carnage of battle, where he won honour and renown, it is true, but also won a grave."

"How horrible!" said Alida, with a shudder. "How could he leave her, and at such a time, too? He could not have loved her."

"Nay, dear one," Percival answered, with slight reproach in his tone, "he loved her passionately, but he would not sully that love by dishonour."

"Percival!" she cried, suddenly, and there was a ring in her voice he could not understand, "would anything change your love for me; any—any dishonour?"

"Why ask such a question, love!" returned,

calmly. "Poverty is no disgrace, and what dishonour could affect the daughter of my old and honourable friend?"

Alida shivered at this mention of her father, as though an icy blast had swept over her.

"But would it, Percival?" she repeated. "Would you leave me if dishonour touched me as he, your ancestor, left her at the call of honour?"

"Thank Heaven, darling!" he said, trying to speak lightly, though he was impressed by her manner. "I shall not be tried as Ronald Ronayne was tried. There are no wars now to take me from your side."

"But, Percival," she insisted, with strange persistence, "is your honour dearer to you than I am?"

He looked at her gravely, searchingly, for a moment, then he answered,—

"I love you, darling, more than any woman upon earth, more than riches, more than life itself, but to your last question let me answer, in the words of my ancestor,—

"I could not love thee, deare, so much,
Loved I not honour more."

A sob, that was almost a cry of despair, rose in her throat at his answer.

"What is it, Alida?" he cried, in a tone of alarm, "and what do you mean by these questions?"

"Nothing, Percival," she said, in her ordinary voice; "it was only my fancy. Nothing can come between us. Nothing shall," she added, to herself.

"Nothing, sweetheart, till death parts us," he returned, as they sauntered back to find Mrs. Palairot and the children.

She was feverishly gay the whole of the rest of the day; but at night, when she was alone in her small bedchamber, a storm of passionate sobs shook her slight frame.

"I cannot tell him now!" she cried, in despair; "he would leave me for ever, and I should die. Oh, Heaven, forgive me! I hope it is not a very wicked act, but I cannot give him up, I will not give him up; I love him so, more than he loves me, for I would not put honour before love, and yet—and yet how grand he looked as he told me that he would hold the honour of his race even before me! I love him the better for it. Oh, if he should ever know he will despise me, but there is no one to tell him, and I shall be safe."

Although she came to this somewhat comforting persuasion Alida's pillow was wet with tears, and she never closed her eyes the whole night through.

CHAPTER III.

FIVE years had passed since Percival Ronayne married the woman of his choice—five years of such unalloyed happiness as is seldom vouchsafed to mortals.

The years had but added to and matured Alida's beauty. An adored wife, a happy mother, she seldom had time to think of the skeleton buried away in a cupboard—so fast secured, in fact, that it seemed as though it would never see the light of day.

The fear of its discovery, which had haunted the first months of her married life, had almost entirely passed away from her mind. She expanded and glowed under the warmth of the love lavished upon her, till her beauty became quite remarkable.

Percival Ronayne himself looked five years younger instead of older. His step was firmer, his bearing more erect, his face handsomer than ever. Not a single added line of silver was to be seen in his dark hair for the passage of these five years. He could not doubt the strength of his wife's love for him, and when an heir was born to his ancient name his happiness appeared complete.

It would be hard to say which idolised most the lovely boy that had been given to them, the mother who so fondly watched over him, and saw new baby faces unfolding every day, or the father who imagined he could trace in his

infantile features those of the woman he loved so well.

Mrs. Palairot and Bertie and Grace were happy, too, in the rose-embowered cottage with the neat maid-servant that Percival had provided for them.

Grace was almost a young lady, and Bertie had grown into a fine lad, and both were very fond of their curly-haired little nephew. Bertie, indeed, would have taken the little four-year-old on sundry bird-nesting expeditions, only the mother's fears would not allow her darling out of her sight.

The little Morton—Percival had named his son after his old friend—was seldom separated from his mother. Instead of delegating such duties to the nurse, Alida herself took him for walks and rambles in the woods which surrounded Ronayne Court. She pointed out to his infantile eyes the beauties of bird, and leaf, and blossom, deeming that Nature was one of the best teachers of youth.

Sometimes Grace and Bertie would accompany her, sometimes Percival, in these rambles in the woodland glades, but often she and her beautiful darling would go alone, he asking innumerable questions in childish prattle, which she strove her best to answer, though sometimes the riddles he propounded, in all good faith, thinking that his mother must know everything were worthy of the Sphinx, and would have puzzled an Odipus to answer correctly.

So the days passed on in an unbroken stream of bliss, till one afternoon something occurred which brought back all her dread of Percival discovering her secret. As usual, she had been wandering about with her child gathering the wild flowers and ferns, and wreathing them into chaplets to crown him with, while he laughed in glee and clapped his rosy palms at his flower-decked reflection in a clear, still pool, till his pattering little feet grew tired, and he climbed up into her lap as she sat on the trunk of a fallen tree, and in a short space of time fell fast asleep.

A fair picture they made, the beautiful young mother and her cherub of a child flower-crowned, with his downy cheeks rose-flushed, and his dimpled fists curled round, with the background of waving grass and varied leaf.

It was a picture of holy, tender mother, love and innocence, a sight to gladden the heart of any right-minded man or woman.

It did gladden the eyes of one who beheld it, but hardly in a right-minded fashion.

Lurking behind the bushes, greedily, hungrily regarding mother and child with a darkling, evil glance was a man who had the appearance of a tramp. A sorry looking wretch he was, with his clothes hanging in tatters about him, a pinched, hungry look on his unshorn face, and with a shifty, leering glance in his bloodshot eyes.

After stealthily regarding Alida and her child for some moments, he drew quietly nearer.

"Lady," he whined, with the true professional twang, "give a poor chap summat to get a loaf. I ain't touched a mouthful to-day."

Alida looked up with a slight start on being thus addressed, but it was not an uncommon circumstance to come across tramps.

"I have no money out with me," she said, gently, "but if you go to Ronayne Court they will give you food there."

"An' who shall I say sent me?" whined the tramp, coming still closer, and peering into her face in an insolent fashion; albeit his words were lowly.

"Say Mrs. Ronayne sent you; they will not fail to give you food then," Alida replied, drawing back somewhat haughtily.

"Shall I not rather say Alida Clarke sent me?" hissed the tramp, in a triumphant tone.

Mrs. Ronayne's face paled to a ghastly hue, "Who, and what are you?" she stammered, rising to her feet, but carefully, so as not to wake the sleeping child.

"I'm not surprised at your asking that question," he returned, familiarly. "I'm a deal more changed than you are, though you are changed too. By George, I'd no idea you'd turn out such a splendid woman; you were pretty then when I made sheep's eyes at you, but you were pale and

alight, now you're glorious. Prosperity and an easy mind seemed to have agreed with you."

"Who are you?" repeated Alida, with a terrible fear at her heart.

"You don't know me!" in a jeering tone. "No," falteringly.

"I don't wonder. I ain't much like the swell as laid 'is and 'an 'art at your feet, only to be spurned like a mangy dog," grinding out the last words savagely.

"You cannot be, oh! I will not believe it——"

"Bob Hackett, at your service, mum," with an ironical bow; "but 'tis I. You see a convict establishment isn't as conducive to good looks as plenty of tin, a fine 'ouse an' a lovin' 'usban'. He! he! how much longer will he be lovin'!"

"Oh! Heaven," broke from Alida's white lips, "but how—how!"

"Ow do I come 'ere? Simple enough. I'm out on a ticket-of-leave, I ain't runned away, you can't denounce me. You thought I was a/s, but I'm 'ere, willin' an' ready to forget old scores, an' be your very good friend. 'Ow did I find you out? You say. Well, that wasn't such a simple matter as the other. I searched and searched, but all trace of Alida Clarke had vanished. I thought you'd gone clean out of my life somehow. I'd almost given up the 'opes of meeting you, when one day I see'd you a playin' with that kid there, and somehow your face seemed familiar; still I thought such a grand lady couldn't be my old flame, but I inquired who you were, an' I foun' out you were the lady of Ronayne Court, and 'ow your name were Alida, and then I knew you were the same, an' now I'm certain."

By this time Alida had collected her scattered faculties, and it was in a tolerably firm voice that she asked,—

"What do you intend to do?"

"That depends upon you," the tramp answered. "A fellow must live, an' if you come down with the rhino pretty 'andsome, why well an' good; if not——" and he paused, significantly.

"If not!" she queried, with a quaking heart. "I shall be obliged to go to that stuck-up 'usban' of yours. He! he! I dare say 'e'll kick me out. I've learnt all about 'im an' 'is darned pride, but it'll be nuts to me to see 'is face when I tell 'im 'is precious wife that 'e thinks such a lot on 'is old flame and the daughter of a——"

"Not that, for Heaven's sake," cried Alida, breathlessly, looking around with scared eyes, as though the winds would waft the horrible news to her husband, "anything but that."

"You know 'ow my silence is to be bought," grinned the ruffian, amused at the sight of her distress.

"I have no money out with me," she wailed.

"No; but you 'ave your rings 'ad bracelets; you can give me some of those. You can easily say you lost 'em, an' then in a week's time you can bring me a 'undred pounds, and the same every three months, an' you'll hear no more about me."

"I have no choice," thought the unhappy girl, taking off her bracelets and giving them to the greedy wretch, who gloated over their beauty and value before thrusting them away in the front of his tattered shirt.

"Thanky, mum," he said, turning to move off, "these'll keep me for a week, then I'll come 'ere again, and mind you 'ave the 'undred pounds ready if you don't want that precious 'usban' of yours to know," and he shuffled off at a good rate with his booty, leaving Alida overwhelmed with despair. In a moment the skeleton had been dragged forth from its hiding-place, and all the quiet bliss of the last five years was swept away. Never more could she look into her husband's eyes fearlessly; her dreadful secret would weigh her down and make her feel like a criminal before him. How bitterly now she regretted not having told Percival all before she married him!

The past five years had shown her the depth and strength of his love; even now would he not still adore her even if he knew the truth! Ah! he might not visit her father's sin upon her head,

but would he forgive her long silence, her concealment of the truth!

Her love whispered to her, "Yes, he will forgive everything; you know how noble he is, he will make allowances for you. Confess all even at the eleventh hour;" then fear would mutter, "No, remember his motto, 'Death before Dishonour,' he would never look at you again if he knew."

Alida was distracted by her doubts and fears; she knew not what to do. She loved her husband so dearly that the mere thought of parting from him caused her the deepest distress. No, come what would, she must try and keep the dishonourable secret from him still.

Then there was the hundred pounds. She had not nearly that amount, and her husband was so very liberal to her she did not like to ask him for it, but the day before she had promised to give it to Bob Hackett, nerved by desperation, she managed to stammer out her request.

"You want sixty pounds, darling," he said; "for some of your numerous charities, I suppose! Well, I will draw you a cheque."

"Percival!" she cried, flinging her arms round his neck—her relief was so great that he did not ask her what she wanted it for—"my own dear husband, how good you are to me, so much better than I deserve; but you believe I love you. You will always know that, whatever happens!"

"Of course I know it, little woman," he answered, tenderly, somewhat surprised at her hysterical manner. "You love me even as I love you; and, my darling, it is a pleasure to me to give you this money. Do you know that it is the first you have asked me for since we were married!"

Well did she know it, for he had supplied her most bountifully with everything he thought she could possibly wish for, and well, too, did she fear it would by no means be the last.

The next day, after having changed the cheque for notes and gold, Alida made her way alone to the rendezvous, to little Morton's great disgust, for he was not accustomed to a refusal from his mother when he wished to accompany her.

Hackett was waiting, looking much more respectable as to attire, but with the same gaol-bird appearance on his face.

"Well," he commenced, as Alida came up to his lurking-place, "you ain't troubled yourself to 'urry, you ain't; I've been 'ere more nor arf a 'our. I'd a great mind to go up to the Court, I 'ad," with a leer on his villainous countenance.

Without taking any notice of his speech, though her heart palpitated with fear, Alida commenced counting out the hundred pounds, the ruffian watching her with glowering eyes.

"There," she said, in a voice she vainly tried to render firm, "count it yourself, and now for three months I shall be rid of your presence."

"Quite kerect, mum," Hackett said, with a grin. "You'll be quit o' my presence till this day three months, when I 'opes to pay you another visit, but meanwhile," as Alida turned away, springing after her and seizing her wrist, "I'll 'ave one kiss for the sake of old times," and he tried to put his threat into execution.

With a wild scream Alida wrenched herself from the ruffian's grasp and tried to fly, but in an instant he seized her again.

"Ha! ha! my beauty, you thought to escape, did you, not before I've taken toll of those ripe, red lips; here——" Before he could finish his sentence a blow, delivered with scientific precision, stretched him half senseless on the turf, and Percival Ronayne caught his wife fainting in his arms.

"Look up, Alida, my own, you are safe," he said, tenderly, as he chafed her cold hands.

"Percival," she moaned, "let me die."

"My darling, this has upset you. Let me take you to the house, and then I will give that villain into custody."

"Oh! no, no," she said, shuddering.

"Why not! Alida!" her husband asked, in the utmost astonishment.

"Aye, ask 'er; ask that fine wife o' yours," said Hackett, jeeringly, painfully rising from the

ground, with a scowl on his battered face; "maybe she'll tell you a fine lie or two."

"Cease, scoundrel," said Percival, fiercely; "I will have you in gaol before many hours are over your head."

"Will you, indeed," ironically. "Then I'll proclaim to all the world who and what your wife is."

Percival felt Alida shiver in his arms. He turned to Hackett.

"Tell the world what you like," he said, sternly, "there are no secrets between my wife and me."

"Well, I'm blowed," exclaimed Hackett, taken off his guard by this calm declaration. "You mean to tell me yer knows your wife's the daughter of a darned forger who slit his wizen to escape from consequences! Wot did she bring me the 'undred for!"

Not a muscle of Percival's face betrayed what he felt at this astounding intelligence, but one glance at the drooping form of his wife told him it was the truth.

"She made a mistake, I own," he replied, quietly; "but she wished to spare me all associations with one of your standing. Now, listen! I will give you one chance; remove out of this neighbourhood at once, and I will not give you into custody, but dare to molest my wife, or so much as mention her name, and that moment I hand you over to the authorities. Go!"

Hackett did not wait to be told twice; he slunk off, muttering between his teeth,—

"I'll be even with you yet, my fine gentleman, pokin' your nose in an' spoilin' my game in this fashion! I'll give it yer, darn yer, for stoppin' my income, an' for spoilin' my beauty! I'll be even with yer, or my name's not Bob Hackett!" shaking his fist in the direction of the two figures he had left.

"Percival, you know!" whispered Alida, in scarcely audible tones, not daring to raise her face, but feeling some slight comfort from the fact that her husband's tender clasp had not loosened from about her slender waist.

"I know nothing, dear," he answered, gravely.

"Alida were that man's words true?"

"Ye—es," she breathed, faintly. "Oh! Percival! do not hate me! I strove to tell you before we were married, but I feared to lose your love; I could not give you up! You remember that day when you told me about Ronald, and the honour of your race! I was trying to tell you then, but I could not!—I could not! I should have died without your love, and I knew with your pride you would not marry the daughter of a forger and suicide."

"My poor darling!" Percival said, compassionately.

"You love me still! You will not send me away from you!" she cried, breathlessly, looking up into his face with a wild gleam of hope in her eyes.

"Where would my boasted honour be then?" he returned, gently. "Would it be honourable for me to send away my wife—the woman I swore at the altar to love and cherish all the days of my life—for a sin not her own! No, darling! you are mine, and mine you will remain till death parts us! But I am sorry you never confided in me. Have I not proved my love? Was I so harsh that you should doubt me?"

"Percival! forgive me! forgive me!" she cried, in an anguish of remorse.

He stooped and kissed her.

"If it will make you any happier, Alida, know that I forgive you freely! How could I do anything else! It was your love for me made you afraid. But, darling, there is one thing I cannot understand. I never heard a word of this; surely my old friend's name would not have escaped me in so painful a matter!"

"He changed it," she answered in a low voice. "You heard of John Clarke, who, when he was arrested on a charge of forgery, committed suicide by cutting his throat!"

Her husband answered in the affirmative.

"He was my father!" she continued, shamefacedly. "That man who was here just now, Robert Hackett——"

"If I he was mixed up in it, was he not? I remember the name," Percival said, knitting brows.

"Yes," she replied. "Percival," solemnly, "I believe that man to have been my father's murderer, not actually, but morally! I have always suspected that he forged the cheque, of which crime my father was accused."

"What makes you think this, Alida?"

"Percival, I will tell you everything now; there shall be no more concealment between us. This man, who only knew my father under the name of Clarke, had a great influence over him; he used to come to our poor lodgings and—and he fell in love with me! I was very young at the time, but I loathed his hateful attentions, and told him so pretty plainly. He swore to be revenged, and from that time my unfortunate father went from bad to worse till the end came. Hackett, for all his cleverness, was taken, and sentenced to penal servitude. He is out on ticket-of-leave, and by chance saw me and recognised me, and, finding I was married, threatened to expose me."

"Yes, and a nice life he would have led you, Thank Heaven, I happened to be near her when you screamed. My blood boils when I think of you in the power of that scoundrel. Darling, creatures like that are rapacious; he would have robbed you of everything as the price of his silence, and made your life a misery."

"Percival," she said, humbly, "I have misjudged you cruelly. My darling, you are nobler far than I, but if the devotion of my whole life can atone for my fault you shall have it."

"Ah! Alida, I never doubted your love. My dear one, this shall only draw us closer. We will begin life anew, with no cloud between us," and a sense of rest and peace stole over her, such as she had not felt in all her married life, as her head drooped on his shoulder, and his strong arms closed round her in a closer embrace.

CHAPTER IV.

To Alida Ronayne had been happy in her married life before, when the weight of her secret had marred her enjoyment, she was doubly so now when nothing came between her and her husband, and she could rest assured that nothing would change his love for her.

Percival was tenderer, more lover-like than ever, but at times a grave shade would pass over his face when alone. Though careful not to let his wife see it, yet it had been an undoubted blow to his pride to learn that his father-in-law had wound up his descent in the social scale by committing the crime of forgery, and then, not daring to face consequences, had weakly and rashly taken his own life, leaving his second wife and his three children to the world's cold mercy.

It was a great blow to him, but there was some consolation in the thought that no one could identify the forger and suicide, John Clarke, with his wife's father and his own trusted old friend, Morton Palaret.

As he had fully forgiven his wife for her long silence, so he never alluded to it again; he only strove, by his tender care and pity, to make her forget that melancholy incident in her father's career.

At first Alida had been a little nervous, fearing that Bob Hackett might turn up again; but as the weeks rolled on and he did not appear, her fears gradually calmed away, and she once more roamed about the woodland glades with her rosy boy, though now she was generally accompanied by Percival, or Bertie and Grace.

She was intensely happy, dividing her love between husband and child. She hardly knew which she adored the most, the husband who had proved himself so true a lover, or the lovely boy whose dimpled arms twined round her neck in loving embrace, and whose baby lips lapped such magic endearments in her ear.

She could hardly bear him out of her sight. Sometimes Percival would jestingly declare that he was jealous of the small tyrant who engrossed so much of her time, but in his heart he knew that he never loved her so well as when she had his son in her arms.

One day Bertie begged permission to take his little nephew for a walk. Alida, who happened to be busy, gave him leave, telling him not to go far, and she would join them the moment she was at liberty.

Away scampered the big and the little boys, delighted with their liberty, chasing butterflies, searching for frogs and newts and horrible creeping things, which would have made their elders shudder to touch, but which the two boys handled with the greatest sang froid.

"Me dot him; look, nunkie Bertie!" exclaimed the small youth, who had been digging in the ground, holding up a fine fat earthworm, that wriggled and twisted about his rosy fingers, for Bertie's inspection.

"All right," shouted his uncle in reply; "come quick, baby, and I'll show you a partridge's nest that's got lots of eggs in it."

"Me'll tum," announced the small youth, jumping up in a hurry, and letting earthworm, frogs, and newts fall to the ground in his excitement at the prospect of discovering the new treasure, and tearing his clothes in his reckless endeavour to push through the bushes and keep up with Bertie's long stride.

Quite forgetful of his sister's injunctions not to leave the grounds of the house till she could join them, Bertie had passed the confines of the park in his search for doubtful treasures, and was now in the fields beyond.

"Come on, baby," he cried, without once looking round to see how the youngster was faring; "it isn't far, in the hedge over there. See," he continued, as he crept slowly up to it, "there goes the mother bird, now we shall be able to see the eggs," and he cautiously peered into where the nest was placed; "one, two, three; there are seven, I declare! Come, baby, only you mustn't touch, because Percy would be angry. Aren't they pretty?"

Receiving no answer, he looked round, and great was his consternation on perceiving no baby in sight.

Loudly he called, but nothing answered him.

Hastily he retraced his steps to where he had last seen Morton, but no child was there. The hole he had dug, and some of his scattered treasures showed how lately he had been there; but what could have become of him so suddenly, without sound or cry!

There was no water into which he could have fallen. Seriously frightened, Bertie ran hither and thither, calling him frantically, but without result; little Morton had disappeared as entirely as though he had never been.

After an hour's fruitless search, very reluctantly he was forced to turn his steps towards Ronayne Court. He dreaded above all things meeting his sister, and having to tell her of his carelessness, and how he had unaccountably lost sight of little Morton.

Alida's grief was terrible, when at last Bertie tearfully explained to her the disaster.

Without waiting to reproach him for having paid so little heed to her injunctions, she, after telling the servants and sending them out in different directions to search for the missing child, accompanied him to the spot where he had lost sight of his little charge. But the shades of night fell without the slightest trace of the lost heir of Ronayne Court being found.

Percival rode over to the police-office and engaged a couple of detectives, who looked very wise, and declared that the child must very shortly be recovered; but their efforts were crowned with no greater success than the others.

Alida was nearly wild with grief when the second day closed in without any tidings of her lost darling.

Poor Bertie was in a dreadful state, for he felt himself in some measure the author of the catastrophe, and though neither his sister or brother-in-law reproached him in words, yet their grief-stricken faces were a silent reproach that was almost more than he could bear.

He constantly went over the places where he had been with the child, in the hopes that he might find some trace of him and be enabled to restore him to his distracted mother.

Weary, footsore, and dispirited, he was returning from his fruitless search on the second even-

ing after his loss, when a little ragged wretch ran up to him and put a letter in his hand.

"You're to give that to the lady at once," he said, pointing to Ronayne Court.

"Who is it from? what is it about?" demanded Bertie, breathlessly.

"I dunno," was the careless reply; "a gentleman giv me a copper to give it you, an' that's all I know about it," turning a somersault, and then darting away rapidly.

Bertie was half-inclined to follow him, but seeing the letter was addressed to Alida, and thinking it might concern the missing child, instead of going after the ragamuffin, as his inclination prompted him, he hastened up to the house, where he found his sister pale and red-eyed from weeping.

"This is for you," he said, laying it in her lap, and then retreating to a little distance, while he watched her break the seal and read the missive.

"Is it anything about Morton?" he asked, timidly, as an exclamation broke from her lips.

"Yes—no! I—I cannot tell you!" she answered, hurriedly. "Where is Percy? Has he come home?"

"Yes, I saw him as I came in."

"Tell him to come to me quick, Bertie!"

"All right!" he exclaimed, jumping up, and banging to the door with unnecessary violence, in his eagerness to obey her behest.

"Percival!" she cried, hysterically, as he entered the room, with a very anxious expression on his face; "why did we never think of it before? Hackett has kidnapped our child for revenge! But read!" holding out the letter as she spoke. "He threatens me with vengeance if I dare reveal this to you, or to anyone; but never more will I have secrets from you, my husband!" and she sank into a chair, while a storm of passionate weeping shook her frame.

This is what Percival read,

"What fools ye are yer never thou'd of Bob Hackett! But I tell yer, when that darned 'usban' o' yorn floored me, an' spoilt my little game, I swore to be even with 'm, an' I've kep' my oath."

"I racked my brains as to 'ow I should do it, an' I settled on the kid as the best means. But, darn yer! I got no chance, yer kep' such a good look arter 'im, 'till the day that precious brother o' yorn took 'im out."

"When 'e ras arter the partridge's nest I clapt a shawl over the brat's 'ed, to prevent 'im squeallin', and 'urried away with 'm afore yer could say 'Jack Robinson'."

"An' now I'll tell yer wot I mean to do. That there brat is worth a thousan' pound to me; if yer stumps up that yer shall 'ave 'im back safe an' sound; if yer don't, or if yer tells that 'usban' o' yorn, or anyone else about this, yer shall never see 'im alive again!"

"This ain't no threat, it's Gospel earnest. I'm a desp'rite man, and you've done me out o' my lawful income. But that thousan' pound I will 'ave, or prepare for the worst! Bring it yerself, too! none o' yer capers an' bringin' the coppers down on me! I can see yer coming, an' if yer's up to any o' those larks, yer'll only find a small cop' for yer pains! yer mark my words!"

"Now, 'ow to do it. Yer knows the witch's 'ut at the corner of the wood! I'll wait yer there to-morrow at twelve with the kid, an' if yer brings the rhino we'll exchange; but if yer doesn't cum I'll slit his weazen as sure as my name's Bob Hackett! Act square an' I'll act square, try to dodge me an' yer done, an' so is the kid."

"Oh, Percival! my darling will be killed by that ruffian!" she wailed, in uncontrollable grief.

"No, Alida," he said, soothingly, "your boy shall be returned to you safe and sound."

"Percival! what are you going to do?" she cried, through her sobs, half tearfully.

"I am going down to the witch's hut at once," he answered; "our darling shall not remain one moment longer than I can help in the power of that ruffian!"

"But!" she exclaimed, all her fears turning now in her husband's direction, "he will kill you too! I shall lose both my darlings!"

"Hush! Alida!" he said, gently. "Do not seek to stop me. I shall try bribery, anything to rescue our boy! Money is what he wants, and money he shall have! Think of poor little Morton's misery! perhaps exposed to brutal treatment and blows from that man!"

"Yes, it is horrible! But let me go with you."

"No, no, darling, you would only unnerve me! I must go alone. Once the child is safe in your arms I will set the officers of justice on his track. But he is a desperate man; I believe him to be quite capable of murdering our boy. I must set watch till he is beyond the reach of harm."

"At least!" exclaimed Alida, distracted by her fears for her husband and for her child; "at least, you will take your revolver with you!"

"If you wish it," he answered; "but I think money will be by far a more potent weapon in this case. Dear, compose yourself, and let none suspect where I have gone. The safety of our boy depends upon it."

Alida tried to obey, but it was with a sinking heart she saw him leave on his perilous errand.

Taking all the money he had in the house, though it was very far short of the sum required by Hackett, and armed in accordance with his wife's desire, Percival mounted his horse, and rode swiftly away in the direction of the witch's hut.

This was a tumbledown place some four or five miles from Bonayne Court, in a rather dense wood.

It bore a bad name, and was shunned by all the country people, not one of whose number could be induced to put foot inside it, and who even gave the exterior a wide berth after dark.

Its last wretched inhabitant, who was currently reported to be a witch, and to have sold her soul to the devil, was found one day, after having been missed for weeks, hanging from a rafter in the ceiling, in a mummified condition, and it was supposed that the hanging was the work of the old gentleman himself, who had come for his bargain. It was because it was so shunned and isolated that Hackett had chosen it as a safe retreat.

When he drew near the spot Percival dismounted and tied his horse to a tree, then walked noiselessly to the blackened hut to reconnoitre.

(Continued on page 568)

CONSTIPATION AND HEADACHE.

There is a comfort in the knowledge that so many forms of illness are not due to an actual diseased condition of the system but simply from constipation, which Vogeler's Curative Compound promptly and effectually removes: it is



a pleasant family laxative, blood purifier and health restorer. It is the only known medicine that promotes intestinal cleanliness without debilitating the organs on which it acts. Constipation and dyspepsia

are national evils: they afflict the human race everywhere, and it is a most fortunate thing that an eminent living London physician originated a formula from which this great remedy of the century is made. It is sold in 1s. 1d. and 2s. 6d. sizes by all reliable medicine dealers throughout the world and is the only really effective medicine now before the public for the cure of stomach, liver and kidney disorders, because this great physician has devoted years of study to these troubles, and Vogeler's Compound is the result of his researches.

DEARLY BOUGHT.

—101—

SOME years ago everyone on the diamond fields had heard of Mr. Foster's parcel of diamonds. Buyers, brokers, and diggers were constantly talking of that wonderful collection of gems. No one had ever seen it, and some persons refused to believe in it. Foster would not be such a fool, they said, as to keep a lot of money locked up in diamonds. But those who knew most about Foster believed in his diamonds; in fact, some men knew of stones which he had added to his collection.

In this case rumour had exaggerated wonderfully little; for, as a matter of fact, Mr. Foster's parcel existed, and was little less valuable than it was reported to be. For some years the price of diamonds had been low, and Foster had determined to hold; but he did not keep ordinary stuff, only picked stones of extraordinary quality.

Whenever he bought a parcel he would select any perfect stone there might be in it, and ship the rest. It was his opinion that diamonds would go up, and that he would realize a great profit when he brought his wonderful parcel home. In the meantime he could afford to be out of his money; for he was a fairly prosperous man, as he had some claims in the mine that brought him in a good deal, and had done very well diamond buying and digging.

Though Mr. Foster was a very good man of business, he was in private life by no means free from little weaknesses, and they were not all of them amiable ones. It was harmless, if not commendable, for him to be very careful of his get-up and appearance, and to dress with as much care on the South African diamond-fields as he would have done in London.

No one would have any right to blame him for dyeing his twisted moustache black, and making a very game struggle against the ravages of time; nor did he hurt anyone by his habit of continually bragging and boasting of the position he held and the people he knew "at home," for this is a weakness common to many worthy and respectable dwellers in the distant parts of the world. But he had one failing which was rather mischievous; although he was by no means a young man—for he was nearer fifty than forty—he was as vain as a girl, or rather as a vain man, and he was convinced that he was so attractive and fascinating that the other sex found him irresistible. He loved to pose in the character of a Don Juan, and though his past successes were his favourite topic of conversation, he took care to let it be known that, if he cared, he could continue these little histories up to the present time.

It was his custom every year to vary the monotony of diamond-field life by occasionally paying visits to the coast; and, from the hints and suggestions he would make when he came back, it would seem that when on his travels he was always on the watch for an opportunity to get up the flirtations he gloried in carrying on.

It was on one of these trips that he became acquainted with Colonel and Mrs. Ferguson. Colonel Ferguson was supposed to have lately sold out of the army, and from what he said, he seemed to be possessed of a nice little capital, which he hoped to double in some fortunate venture. He didn't care what he went in for—farming, diamond-mining, gold-digging. He didn't care much what it was, so long as it paid; he said soldiering was a bad game for a married man, and he intended to double his capital before he went home.

Mr. Foster did not at first take very kindly to the Colonel, who seemed a drollish, heavy sort of man, and cared to talk about very little beside betting and racing. But Mrs. Ferguson quite made up for any defects in her husband. She was an extremely pretty young woman, so young-looking that she might have been hardly out of her teens, with a half-mischievous, half-demure manner, which our friend found very fascinating; and it is needless to say that he came to the conclusion that she had fallen in love with him; for it was his idiosyncrasy to believe that he was irresistible with all women. Certainly she was

a woman whom any man might fall in love with—a brown-haired, blue-eyed little thing, with a delightfully neat little figure, and always becomingly dressed.

"By Jove, she's a very nice little woman. I must persuade them to come up to Kimberley. Ferguson would do well there, though he's a stupid out of a fellow," said Mr. Foster to himself, as he gave his moustache a twist, looking at himself in the glass, and putting on a Mephistophelean grin, on which he prided himself.

Accordingly he suggested it to Ferguson that he had better make his home on the diamond fields, as it was the best place for a man of energy and capital. Colonel Ferguson at once fell into the trap which this artful schemer had laid for him.

"Dare say it was as good a place to go to as any other," said he. It seemed to him it was a horrible country; while Mrs. Ferguson was so enthusiastic in persuading her husband, and so anxious to go to the fields, that Mr. Foster put the most flattering inference on her support.

So it came about that Colonel and Mrs. Ferguson were Mr. Foster's fellow-passengers from Capetown to the diamond fields, and, more or less, under his auspices, settled among the queer community who toil for wealth in that land of dust and diamonds.

They took one of those little iron houses in one of the principal streets in Kimberley, in which at that time the most prosperous citizens sheltered in the summer and shivered in the winter.

From their first arrival we all took a good deal of interest in the Fergusons. It was never Mr. Foster's habit to be over-careful not to compromise the ladies he admired; and there was at once a good deal of talk about Mrs. Ferguson, and a good many stories told about her. Colonel Ferguson became a very interesting person when the fact that he was possessed of some little capital, which he wished to invest, was well known, and a good many plans were made for his safely investing it. There was little Mo Abrahams, who came up to him and told him how a few thousands would turn the Victory Mine, lately known as Fool's Rush, into one of the grandest mining properties in the world; and the Colonel seemed to be much struck with the advantages of the speculation, and thanked Mo for giving him such a chance; but he did not settle to go in for it at once, though he freely admitted that, in Mo's words, nothing could be fairer between man and man than the terms suggested.

"We must have another talk over it," he said, and Mo went off rejoicing.

After Mo went away, Bill Bowker, that fine specimen of the rugged honest digger and pioneer of the fields, came up to the Colonel, and with much bad language, which it was his rugged honest custom to use, asked him what the little Jew wanted.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but he is going to let you in with that awinding mine of his. The place was salted before they washed up, and I know where they first got the diamonds they found there. I don't like to see a gentleman like you let in. Now, what you want to go in for is digging in an established mine, not for a wild-cat speculation," and the rugged honest one went on to urge upon the Colonel the advantage of investing his money in some claims that were in that portion of the Du Toit's Pan Mine, which had somehow gained the name of the graveyard, on account of so many persons having buried their fortunes there.

Colonel Ferguson was very much obliged to his kind friend, though he said that he refused to believe that Mo was not a square man; "over-sanguine, perhaps, but means well," he said; "still, I think that what you mention would just suit me. We must have another talk about it."

Thus the Colonel for some time did not settle how he would embark his fortune, but treated with everyone who came to him, almost always entertaining the highest opinion of the suggestions made to him. In the meantime the owners of valuable mining properties were constant in paying him the greatest attention, and he was

asked to share so many small bottles of champagne that the barkeepers looked upon him as a perfect godsend, and dated the revival of prosperity on the fields to his arrival.

As the Colonel had a good deal of spare time on his hands, he was able to indulge in some of the pastimes in which he excelled. After some little time he was recognised as a very fine billiard player. At first there were one or two young men who thought they could beat him, and it was a costly mistake for them; but the Colonel explained he was only just getting back his form, and so accounted for the great improvement which could be noticed in his play, after he had got a little money on. At cards he was very lucky; a fortunate whist player, a good "draw" player, while he had wonderfully good luck, when several times he was persuaded, protesting that it was not at all in his line, to sit down to a game of nap.

However, though his card and billiard playing did not lighten his purse, they compelled him to neglect his wife more than was wise, perhaps. Night after night, while Ferguson was at the club, the dangerous Mr. Foster would be sitting smoking cigarettes in Nellie Ferguson's little sitting-room.

Though people did talk a good deal, there was not much harm in it; and Nellie Ferguson, though she did look so young, was pretty well able to take care of herself. Still, she became far more confidential with her friend Mr. Foster than it was wise for a young woman to be with such a very fascinating man. Certainly, when she told him all her grievances against her husband—how he neglected her, and was always at billiards or cards, leaving her all by herself, how she drank too much, and was generally rather a disappointment—she was taking a course which seemed rather indiscreet. But it was not only about her own affairs she would talk; she took the greatest interest in all he had to say about himself, and would listen to his stories of society with never-failing interest. She would encourage him to read poetry to her, for though his education had been rather commercial than classical, he fancied that he could read well.

"Ah," she would say, "how nice it is to be fond of poetry and art! Now, Tom cares for nothing but billiards, cards, sport, and drink; not even for me, I am afraid." Then she would change the conversation, and talk about Foster's affairs. "Was it true," she would ask, "that he had such a splendid collection of diamonds? She was so fond of seeing them. Couldn't he show them to her?"

Foster made rather a favour of this, for he said that no one had ever seen his diamonds; still, of course, he would show them to Mrs. Ferguson, only she must come down to the office to see them. Mrs. Ferguson didn't altogether like that; she would sooner he brought the diamonds up to the house. However, she said she was determined to see them, and she would constantly return to this subject.

On one occasion, when Mr. Foster called, he found Ferguson at home instead of at the club, and so he did the next time after that; and, rather to his annoyance, he found the Colonel had taken to stop at home. He used generally to sit in the porch, smoking, paying very little heed to his wife or her friend. Still, Mr. Foster found him a good deal in the way, and began to look upon his presence in his own house as little less than an intrusion.

"Do you know that Tom is fearfully jealous of you?" said pretty Mrs. Ferguson to him one evening. "Someone has said something to him, and since then he has never left me out of his sight."

"That's very stupid of him!" said Mr. Foster.

"Yes, it's very silly," said she; "but I'm afraid you're a dreadful man! Anyway, Jack thinks you are, for he has taken to stop at home all day looking after me."

"When is he going to get something to do? If he had more work and less drink, he wouldn't take fancies into his head."

"I don't know," she answered. "I am afraid he will go away to some other place. Won't that be wretched?" she said.

"Wretched, my dear! of course it will," said Mr. Foster; and he would have said a good deal more only the smoke of his cigarette made Nellie choke; and then her husband came into the room, scowled at his guest, helped himself to some whisky, and left it again.

"By the bye," said Nellie, when he had gone, "I've never seen those diamonds; now, you know, you promised I should."

"You must come to the office and see them," he said. "I don't like to bring them up here, unless he's out, for I don't like anyone to see them but you."

"Yes, I know that it's a great privilege for me to see them, though I don't know what harm it can do for a poor little woman like me to see diamonds she can't hope ever to have; you must bring them up here, and show them to me when he's out of the room."

"No, I can't do that; he's always in and out. You must come to the office."

"You wretch!" she said, "you want me to go to your office by myself, but I won't; it wouldn't do at all. Besides, do you know, he never lets me out of his sight for a minute; he hardly ever sleeps for long, and he gets so fearfully violent—I think it's the whisky he takes. Do you know, the other day I thought he would strike me."

Mr. Foster was a good deal impressed with this information, and he looked with no little awe at the culprit, who fidgeted in and out of the room with no particular object. Though he despised the man, he felt a good deal afraid of him.

"By Jove!" he thought to himself, "suppose he took a fancy to go for me—the brute looks pretty strong!"

"If I were you," he said, "I'd give him a strong sleeping draught; he is a misery to himself and everyone else like this."

"I only wish I could," she said; "he gets more nervous and cross every evening, but he won't take anything."

"Well, I'd make him; I'd put a dose into his whisky-and-water, which would send him off fast enough. I'd tell you what to give."

For one minute Nellie seemed to be thinking the matter over. Then she answered,—

"Oh, I wish you would—I'd do it to-morrow; and then you could bring up the diamonds to show me, and we should be alone. Now, write down the stuff I am to get."

Mr. Foster knew a little about doctoring, so he wrote out the quantities of the drug on a leaf of his note-book and gave it to her.

"Now promise to bring up the diamonds to-morrow, and we will look at them when we are alone and he is asleep."

"All right," he said; "but I don't think they will interest you, and I hardly like bringing them out; but I can't refuse you anything, my dear."

Just then Colonel Ferguson came in again, and, as he seemed inclined to stay, Mr. Foster took leave of his host and hostess, the latter giving him a look which seemed to say,—

"Don't forget."

"By Jove!" she is a plucky little woman, and dead gone on me! Why, I believe, if I told her to, she'd put a drop of prussic acid in his whisky!" said Mr. Foster to himself, as he swaggered down to the club from Ferguson's house.

That evening he was in very great spirits, and his anecdotes and epigrams were wonderfully brilliant. Everyone understood the point of what he said, and knew to whom his hints referred; and his toadies told him that he was "a bad lot, a very bad lot," for they knew that this sort of reproach was the most grateful flattery to him.

"What an insufferable cad that little brute is! I hope he comes to grief soon," was the remark of one man who probably didn't like him.

The next evening Mr. Foster opened his safe, and took out his parcel of diamonds. After all there was no danger in taking them as far as the Fergusons' house, though they were so valuable, for the Fergusons lived in one of the principal streets in the town. It was rather a silly whim of the little woman, he thought, her being so set

on seeing the diamonds! but he knew enough of the sex to know that she was determined to have it granted.

The diamonds were in a large snuff-box. There were about a hundred diamonds, weighing from ten to fifty carats each, and they were worth about £20,000.

Something seemed to prompt him to put the diamonds back into the safe; but on the diamond-fields men get used to carrying about stones of great value; and then he thought of Nellie Ferguson's bewitching little face, so he put the diamonds in his pocket, and started off for her house.

The house stood in what was called a garden, though very little grew there. On either side, it was only a few yards from the house next door. As Mr. Foster walked up to the door, Nellie Ferguson came out to meet him.

"Hush," she said, holding her hand up to her mouth; he is asleep. I've given it him; I put it into the whisky bottle, and he took it all."

She beckoned him to follow, and they both went indoors into the sitting-room. From the next room they could hear the heavy breathing of the Colonel.

"Now, have you brought them?" she said. "Yes, I've done what you told me to do," he answered. "Let me show you them."

"Stop," she said, "first let me see if he is fast asleep."

She went into the next room, and came back again.

"He's fast asleep, poor old boy," she said.

Foster thought that he had never seen her look so pretty. She was dressed very prettily; had a very brilliant colour in her cheeks, which became her; and her eyes glittered with excitement.

They sat down, and he poured the diamonds out of the box on to a sheet of white paper, which looked grey contrasted with some of them.

"And these diamonds are worth twenty thousand pounds! How good to bring them!"

Foster thought that he had never seen such a pretty little face as hers was, as she looked at the diamonds with a longing glance; but he was rather surprised when she looked up into his face and said,—

"Give them to me!"

Of course, he had no intention of doing any such thing; the idea was simply absurd, considering their value. And Foster didn't half like this eccentricity of his pretty little friend; still she looked so pretty, that Foster could not feel angry with her. Her face was close to his—she was looking up at him; he stooped down and kissed her.

Just then he heard a step behind him, and as he turned round his head struck against something hard; it was the muzzle of a revolver, which Ferguson was holding.

Ferguson was wide awake, and there was a very ugly grin of triumph in his face.

"Well, you're a nice man, you are, to drop in friendly of an evening! Hush! don't speak out loud, or I'll blow your brains out at once," said the Colonel.

Nellie Ferguson didn't seem to be a bit disconcerted. She had snatched up the diamonds, and she was turning them over, watching their sheen with evident pleasure. Mr. Foster, however, felt anything but at his ease. The situation was a very strange one, for if he shouted out "Murder!" he would be heard by his neighbours on both sides, who were only separated from him by a few feet of open space, and a few inches of wall. One of them was a young diamond buyer, with a taste for comic singing, who had just returned from a trip home, and was entertaining his friends. And, as he stood, shivering with fear, with the revolver held up to his head, Foster could hear the chorus of one of the songs of the day. He had never cared less about comic singing. But though help was so near, he felt completely in the power of Ferguson, who looked very resolute and reckless, and seemed to be quite in earnest.

Personal courage never was Mr. Foster's strong point, and now, for a minute, he felt too startled to think—in fact he only had sufficient sense

left to make him restrain his inclination to shout out for help. After a second or two he began to feel more assured. It seemed so unlikely that he should be murdered in the middle of the town, within calling distance of several men only the revolver was real enough. When a man is holding a revolver up to your head you have the worst of the position. He may not care to shoot; but, on the other hand, he may; and, whatever the ultimate consequences may be to him, the immediate consequences to you are sure.

In a half-hearted way for one second Foster thought of resisting, and he made a movement with his hand towards his pocket.

"Keep your hands up; you'd better," said the other.

Foster obeyed him, and sat holding his hands above his head, looking very ridiculous.

"You'd better take that from him, Nell," said Ferguson.

And Nellie Ferguson put her hand into her dear friend's pocket and deftly eased him of his revolver. A gleam of hope came into Mr. Foster's heart. After all, he thought, people don't commit homicide without reason; and he saw that he had not to deal with an outraged husband, but with a pair of sharpers.

He certainly began to wish that his diamonds were in his safe at home; but he knew they were difficult property to deal with, and hoped to get off without making any great sacrifice.

"What the deuce do you mean by this, Colonel Ferguson?" he said, trying to put on an air of unconcern he didn't feel. "Surely, it's a poor joke to steal into your own drawing-room, and hold a revolver up to the head of a man you find calling on your wife."

"I don't set up for being a good joker," said the Colonel; "but my jokes are eminently practical, as you'd learn if the police of London, New York, 'Frisco, told you what they knew of Tom Ferguson."

"Well, you'd better say what you hope to make out of this," said Mr. Foster.

"I intend," said the Colonel, "to make a job for the coroner of you, and take those diamonds for myself."

"Don't talk nonsense, man, you won't frighten me; I'm not so easily fooled. Why, if I don't turn up, a dozen men will know where to look for me; besides that, they will hear you shoot next door. Why, if you shoot, you'd be hung."

"You've no need to bother your head about me. I can play this hand without your advice," said the Colonel. "See here, first I shoot you, then Nell puts the diamonds away; then I give myself up to the police; Nell confesses; I take my trial like a man, and show that I shot you because I found you here in company with my wife, after you'd got her to drug my liquor. See here, the whisky bottle in the next room is drugged. Nell has got the paper you wrote out. The chemist she got the stuff from can be found, and you've taken care to let everyone know what your game is. What do you think a jury would do to me? You'd have to look a long time before you'd get one who would find me guilty of murder. Hang! Why, I shall be looked upon as the vindicator of the sanctity of domestic life. They'd get up a testimonial for me."

Then Mr. Foster realised the terrible position in which he was placed. The man seemed to be in earnest, and there was a determined look in his cruel, hard face, which made Foster believe that he dared to do what he said; and if he did, it was true that he would be in very little danger of being punished.

Foster could remember a somewhat similar case, in which a jury had endorsed the popular verdict of "Served him right," by finding a prisoner, who had killed the man who had wronged him, not guilty.

He could hear the words of the song which were being sung next door, and he knew that if he shouted out murder he could summon help, but he dared not shout out. Help was near, but the revolver was nearer.

"Stop," he said, catching at a last straw; "you don't know that someone can prove I had the diamonds with me."

"I'll chance that," said Ferguson. "You see, no one has ever seen the diamonds but us."

As Ferguson said this Nellie left the room with the diamonds in her hand, and then came back again without them. Foster felt that he had seen the last of the stones, which were likely to cost him so dear.

"Spare me! for Heaven's sake, spare me! What have I done that you should kill me? Keep the diamonds, and let me go."

"That won't do, I am afraid," said Ferguson; "you might change your mind, and try to get the diamonds back. Of course, I don't want to shoot you, but it's the way to play my game."

Then Mrs. Ferguson, who had come back into the room, spoke for the first time.

"What's the good of all this talk, Jack? Make haste and get it all over."

Just then, in his extremity, an idea came into Foster's mind, and again he began to hope.

"Stop," he said. "Why kill me? I have money in the bank. Spare me, and I will write a cheque for two thousand."

"It's risky for me," said Colonel Ferguson. "Still, a little ready comes in handy. I will take five thousand."

With a very shaky hand Foster wrote out the cheque for the amount asked for, the Colonel still holding the revolver up to his head. Foster handed over the cheque.

"Now I can go, I suppose?" he said, making for the door.

"Not yet," said the other. "Get the paper, Nell. Now write out a note to me, inclosing the cheque for a card debt," he added, as his wife took down some paper, and placed it before their guest.

Foster wrote the letter he required.

"That will do. Now write to Nell, sending her the diamonds."

"What am I to say?" said Foster.

"What are you to say? Why, you don't want me to write a love-letter to my own wife—it's more in your line than mine; but make it pretty sweet, for I don't know but that the old plan isn't best, after all."

Foster had written love-letters before, but never under similar circumstances, with the husband witnessing the performance with a loaded revolver in his hand, nor had he ever made such a very extensive present.

It was some time before he could pull himself together sufficiently to write, and one or two attempts were condemned by his severe critic, who said,—

"No; that sort of trash isn't good enough. Put a little more sugar in it. Why, hang it, man, I thought you were so good at it!"

At last the right sort of note was written.

"That will do. Here, what do you think of it, Nell?" said the Colonel, passing the note across to his partner.

"Why, I think it's a dear little note; it's a beautiful note; the prettiest note I ever got! What a darling man you are to give me such a present, and yet what a wicked wretch you are to write like that to me!" and Mrs. Ferguson looked at her correspondent, who was regarding her with no very loving glance, and then burst into a peal of silvery laughter.

The Colonel seemed to take up the joke.

"Why, hang it, man," he said, "but you're a generous, big-hearted fellow! There are some men who wouldn't care about their wives taking presents from such a gay fellow as you, but I know you mean no harm, old fellow," and the Colonel gave him a slap on the back which made him start with terror. "No," he continued, as his visitor made a motion as if he were going, "you shan't go yet. Stop and drink—stop and drink!" he repeated, with a warning gesture in his face.

Mr. Foster sat down at this pressing invitation, and took one or two glasses of brandy-and-water. He felt that his nerve was altogether gone, and that he was obliged to obey the other.

At last Ferguson let him go, and opening the door for him, took a noisy leave of him, that the neighbours must have heard; and then he lunched home in such a state of brandy and shock that he could hardly realise his loss before he tumbled into bed.

The next morning he did not wake up until it was late—past ten o'clock—and then he by degrees remembered the events of the night before.

"Was it a dream?" he thought; and he went to his safe and found out that it was no dream—the diamonds were not there.

What could he do to get his diamonds back was his first thought. He could think of nothing, for he remembered the letters he had written, and already it was too late to stop the cheque, for he knew it would have been presented as soon as the bank opened. Then he began to think that the best thing he could do would be to keep his sorrows to himself, for no one would believe his story; and the people who lived next door to the Fergusons would have heard Colonel Ferguson let him out of his house, and would never believe that anything of the sort had happened to him that evening.

So Mr. Foster did nothing, and he was not surprised that evening to hear that among the passengers by the coach to Capetown were his friends, the Fergusons.

He never saw them again, nor did he wish to. They were last seen, some time ago, in Paris. Ferguson was the same stolid, heavy-dragon-looking man, and Nellie Ferguson was as young and charming-looking as ever; and they seemed to be very prosperous, so they probably did well with Foster's diamonds.

THE GARDENER'S DAUGHTER.

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CHAPTER XXII.—(continued.)

THE hours passed very rapidly. A long, dreamless sleep disposed of half-a-dozen; a stroll about the grounds, a cup of tea, and it was actually seven o'clock, and nearly time to dress for dinner—time, at least, to go indoors.

She had picked some lovely roses and a few bits of mignonette, with a view to her evening toilette; and as she had been strolling or sitting about the grounds, she was not aware of the arrival of a hired fly.

Captain Elliot, who came earlier than was anticipated, had—an Englishman's first thought, "a tub," changed his clothes, partaken of a light repast, heard that the whole party were absent with stolid indifference, and had settled himself in a comfortable chair in the library, with a sporting paper for his companion. He sat with his back to the light; the windows were French and opened to the ground, and he presently heard a sound—a light step, as it were, in high-heeled shoes—coming along the flagged terrace; then one of the windows was pushed open—it had been ajar—and a girl entered the room.

She did not see him, as he was almost concealed in a large morocco arm-chair, and tossing her hat down on the table she walked past him to the end of the apartment—to that common goal of both sexes, a looking-glass. She stood with her back to him, deliberately looking at herself, and arranging some flowery in her dress.

He could not see her face, but her figure was most admirable, her head well set on, her hair abundant; there was an air of distinction about her. She was decidedly "somebody." Her dress, which was white and plain, was from no provincial dressmaker, and fitted her slender person like a glove.

For fully three minutes she continued her operations before the mirror, entirely unconscious of anyone's presence, and he looked on from above his newspaper with lazy interest. All at once the girl turned round, and turning, came face to face with Captain Elliot.

Was he in his senses? The girl could not be. Yes, but it was—Mary Meadows, or rather, Mary Elliot!

She did not observe him for a second, but when he suddenly threw down his paper and rose from his chair she started back, recognised him, and became very pale.

"What is this?" he asked; "is it really you! How did you come here!"

"How do you do!" she replied, with wonderful self-possession, but then she had been prepared for a meeting like this, and he had not. "I came here by invitation. Mrs. Seymour is a friend of mine."

"How—when did you meet her!"

"At Folkestone. I live there," looking at him gravely.

"Your circumstances have apparently altered a good deal since we met last!" glancing at her dress and her diamonds on her fingers.

"Oh, yes! Won't you sit down?" seating herself. "Have you not heard!"

"I have heard nothing about you," astonished at her manner.

"Not thinking it worth while to inquire!" she added, coolly.

"Exactly! And in the deserts of the Soudan, or in hospital—between which places I have spent the last two years—one is not in the way of hearing of things that interest one, much less those that do not."

"So he is going to keep his word!" she said to herself; "he will have nothing to do with me. We will see about that if he puts me on my mettle," her spirits rising at the thought of the obstacles before her.

"You have not heard that I am not the daughter of John Meadows!"

"Yes; you told me that two years ago."

"But I did not then know who I was," she continued, colouring at his tone of cool contempt.

"I am Miss Darvall of Daneford."

"Indeed!"

"You are not surprised!"

"Well, I admit that I am, since you ask me, for I was under the impression that you were Mrs. Elliot of Carnport Park!"

There was a stinging sarcasm in this speech that sent the blood to her face and tied her tongue, and upset her well-bred composure with a violent shock.

"When was this discovered?" he asked, after a pause.

"About two years ago. It was proved that I was the child of Godfrey Elliot, who died in America."

"Then I was right when I guessed that you had good blood in your veins!"

"Yes, but my mother, who died when I was a baby, was a chorus singer."

"Indeed! Has the family talent descended to you?" he asked, feily.

"Yes. I have a good voice."

"And what has become of the other Darvalls?"

"Oh, they live on at Daneford. I hate the place, and they are most welcome to stay there."

"And what do they live on?"

"I—I—I share with them."

"Miss Julia Darvall—has she made a great match!—married the duke or earl that her father expected?"

"No," replied Mary, with a blush.

"I suppose the positions are reversed between you now, and you are her patroness!"

"Oh, no!"

"Do you live alone at Folkestone, Miss Darvall?"

"No; I have a companion—a chaperon—a Mrs. Clara. She is here."

"How comes it that you are alone? I scarcely anticipate that you remained at home to receive me!"

"No, certainly not; you were not expected, and it was only yesterday that I knew you were Mrs. Seymour's cousin, and that you were coming here. Had I known in time—" and she hesitated.

"You would have stayed away, and so would I. However, I shall take myself off to-morrow!"

"Do not, pray, on my account," she exclaimed, rather haughtily.

"Oh, no. I shall leave entirely on my own! I do not choose to be under the same roof with you."

"You are polite and candid, at any rate," said the lady, colouring with annoyance.

"Yes. You gave me an excellent lesson in

politeness and candour that night on Folkestone pier."

"I was wrong. I was rude, I admit. I have been sorry for it since."

"Well, it is rather late to be sorry now."

"It was all my pride."

"And am I to have no pride, or have you an entire monopoly of the article?"

Mary was silent. She pulled a rose to pieces and then said,—

"What are we say to Mrs. Seymour?"

"Say. What do you mean?"

"I mean," speaking with an effort; "is she to know that we have ever met before, or are we to be strangers?"

"Strangers of course, as we are, and ever will be!"

"She knows—she suspects that you are married!"

"The deuce she does."

"I heard her saying so last evening to—some low creature whom you are ashamed to own."

"Indeed! and who swears she could never own me. Of course she has not the ghost of an idea that this pattern wife is the beautiful Miss Darvall—no more than I had when I heard some fellows discussing Miss Darvall at the club last night, and talking of her air—her coldness; her face, and her fortune, that they were discussing any one but the fair Julia. I thought she must be strangely altered, for she was never particularly 'cold,' but I little dreamt that they were criticising you."

At this moment there was a sound of many footsteps and voices in the hall, and the door opened and Mrs. Seymour looked in.

"Why, Max, so I hear you have arrived!" hurrying over to meet him as he rose, and kissing him as she spoke. "So glad to see you, my dear boy! You look thin, and—brown, and—older; but otherwise not much the worse for having been in the wars," holding him at arms' length as she spoke; then glancing at Mary she said,

"Ah, you cannot tell what he was, as you have never seen him before. I'm glad now you stayed at home, Marie, since my cousin came down early. I hope you have been amusing each other, and making one another's acquaintance?"

"I can only speak for myself," said Captain Elliot, with a slight bow in the direction of the young lady. "Miss Darvall has been a most entertaining companion. She has told me all the latest news, and has been kind enough to amuse me for the last half-hour."

There was a latent sting in his speech that cut the listener like the lash of a whip. She bestowed a haughty, angry glance upon Max, unseen by his cousin, and with a murmured excuse left the room, with the air of an outraged princess.

"I'm so glad you have met her, Max, and you seem to have made friends. You were chattering away like anything when we first came in. She is usually rather distant with strangers, but she is a charming girl when you know her, and an immense favourite with me. If there were no drawbacks on your side, she is just the very girl that I should like to see your wife!"

"Just the very sort of girl you would like to see your wife!" he echoed, with a curious laugh.

"You are always bent on match-making, my dear Sophy, and always thinking of who you can possibly marry me to. Now, I positively assure you, for the hundredth time, that I shall never marry."

"Oh, Max!"

"Yes, and I dare say you have half-a-dozen girls staying here in this house now, all picked out with a view of one or other of them becoming Mrs. Maxwell Elliot, and Miss Darvall for first choice! Is not that pretty near the truth—eh, Sophy?"

"Well, supposing it is," said Mrs. Seymour, with a rather embarrassed laugh; "what is the harm?"

"Then I tell you it's no go—I'll never marry anyone, least of all your new protégée and favourite, Miss Darvall!"

"Can't very well," he muttered to himself, as he obeyed his cousin's hasty injunction to be off

and dress. "Can't do what is already accomplished, or marry a girl a second time!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

MARY DARVALL took unusual pains with her toilette that evening. She was resolved to look her very best, and Carter was quite astonished to find what an interest she evinced in her appearance.

Carter had to dress Mrs. Clara first, and this was a long business, and usually left but little time to spare for Carter's lawful mistress, whom she was surprised to find nearly ready when she appeared.

She wore an exquisitely soft cream satin gown, with square-cut body and elbow sleeves, trimmed with quaint old lace, and diamond pendant at her throat, and several diamond rings in her hair.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Clara, as she rustled in, amid a breeze of scent. "You have been getting yourself up. What an age you have been dressing! You will eclipse all," looking at her with envious criticism.

Now, if her charge had said, "What an age you have been dressing, and you have been getting yourself up," there would have been good grounds to go on.

Mrs. Clara was powdered and painted in a most delicate and artistic manner—almost defying detection. Her eyebrows and her lashes were miracles in their way, so was her hair.

She was dressed in a very handsome crimson satin dress, veiled with black lace, and all the little minutiae of her toilette was beyond cavil.

"I want to see if this brooch is straight!" she said, elbowing herself between Mary and the glass—a business she might just have well as arranged in her own room. "I suppose you know that Captain Elliot has come!" still touching herself off, and approaching the mirror.

"Yes; I've met him."

"Ah—ah!" looking up; "was that the reason you stayed at home to have him all to yourself! Oh, Miss Slyboots," with affected gaiety.

"No; certainly not!" returned Mary, colouring.

"Well, what is he like? I've heard of him often from my darling Charlie. He used to say he was a wild young 'sub,' an awful flirt, thought nothing of breaking hearts, and making fools of people; but that among men he was the most generous and best-hearted boy that ever breathed."

"He is not a boy now," said her listener.

"No, he must be twenty-nine or thirty. How time flies! I've heard so much of him, I feel as if I knew him, and that he was quite an old friend. I shall tell him so, too!" smiling admiringly at her handsome reflection.

Undoubtedly, thought her two companions, Mrs. Clara is bent on making a serious conquest.

"I wish, dear Marie, you would lend me one of your diamond bracelets, just to set off my dress! I feel so insignificant beside you. You are so tall and so superbly dressed, and it looks so odd to see you, the unmarried girl, blazoned with diamonds, and me, the poor old matron, with nothing but some paltry gold ornaments!"

She seemed to forget that Miss Darvall had thousands a year, and she merely her salary of one hundred pounds, paid quarterly.

"You are quite welcome to the bracelet," said Mary, taking it out of its case as she spoke, and handing it to her.

"Thanks, dearest," clasping it on. "But you have not told me as yet what Captain Elliot, 'Max,' as they called him, is like!"

"You will see him in a minute or two, and be able to judge for yourself, for there is the 'second gong.'"

"Yes; so it is. Wait for me, darling!"

hurrying after her into the corridor. "Here, take my arm; we make a good contrast, don't we?" she said, as Mary, swept downstairs and saw themselves in a mirror, half-way down, reflected the whole staircase. "The tall and the

short, the dark and the fair, the married and unmarried, matron and maid—we won't say the young and the old, dear, will we!"

"Oh, no, of course not!" returned her charge, indifferently.

"People have often taken me for your sister. Who is that?" she whispered, as a gentleman whom they had overtaken stood aside politely to allow them to pass. "Is that Captain Elliot?"

A little nod of assent was her only answer. "My dear, he is divinely good-looking—just the style of all others that I admire. I must try and get Mrs. Seymour to send me in to dinner with him."

And Mrs. Clare gained her point. Mary had the pleasure of sitting exactly opposite to this couple, and noted the unusual vivacity and sprightliness of her companion, the little by-play and swift glances she bestowed on her cavalier, the familiar tapping with her fan, the challenge in her eyes.

Mary was at first coldly scornful and disgusted. This was when Captain Elliot was visibly bored and irresponsible; but after a while his old habits came back to him with remarkable ease.

He laughed and talked, answered jest with jest, story with anecdote, glance with glance. They were by far the most animated, mutually-pleased couple at the table, and seemed entirely absorbed in one another.

Captain Elliot had noted with inward amusement his *vis à vis* looks of cool contempt at first, and then these looks changed to indignant amazement. Finally, they were averted altogether.

She was jealous, was she! The notion tickled him excessively, and another idea yet more so.

To think that that beautiful, haughty-looking girl opposite, with priceless lace on her dress, ruffles and diamonds in her hair, had once been Mary Meadows, his rustic sweetheart, and that for four years she had been his wife!

It was the first time since the disastrous wedding breakfast that he had sat at table with her; and what a change had come o'er the spirit of the dream in four years!

It was the first time that he and his wife had ever met in company of their own rank; and he thought, as he glanced across at her profile and pose of aristocratic composure, that no sane person would believe that she had ever occupied any special position beneath that of Miss Darvall, the heiress.

"I suppose she thinks I am going to fall in love with this agreeable elderly spin; but I'm not quite such a fool as all that. However, a little flirtation with a lady who is so well able to take care of herself is no harm, and will rouse the loneliness of jealousy in Mrs. Elliot's fair bosom. I shall be rather interested to see what she will do."

He was extremely interested, but not agreeably so, in watching the court that was paid to her by several of the men in the house.

When they entered the drawing-room three of them made a palpable race for the seat on the ottoman beside her. It was secured by the most determined of the three, and the two others hung over from the back, and she talked to them all with strict impartiality.

Meanwhile Mrs. Clare had drawn Captain Elliot aside, to a nook well hidden in the window-curtains.

"Do come here and amuse me!" she cried, "and tell me ever so many things I want to know. We can talk here as much as we like, while those girls murder that overture!"

"What can I tell you, Mrs. Clare?" he asked, taking the proffered place.

"How long are you going to stay?" looking up at him.

"I am not sure."

He had changed his mind about leaving the house the next day.

"I hope you will stay as long as we do."

"You may be sure that I shall."

"Now, tell me. What do you think of my ward?"

"Ward! Mrs. Clare!"

"Well, my charge. Miss Darvall, the heiress."

"I—I scarcely know Miss Darvall."

"She has a romantic story. I suppose you know it?"

He nodded his head.

"She has certainly done wonders for herself, considering all things. She is very well bred, has a good knowledge of French, sings delightfully—you will hear her just now—and has quite the style and air of one accustomed all her life to move, not in the kitchen as she once did (there was a spice of spite in this), but in the drawing-room as she does now. Indeed, many well-bred girls have not half her air of distinction and easy, natural manners."

"I suppose good breeding tells in the long run! No doubt yours is an onerous post, the chaperon to a handsome heiress."

"In some ways. She is cold and reserved, a sort of girl that you can never get to the bottom of; a girl who keeps her secrets and her thoughts to herself; but she is no trouble in one way. She does not care about men, keeps them all at their distance, snubs some of them quite rudely, and says she will never marry," and Mrs. Clare nodded her head three times.

"Oh! Says she will never marry, does she?"

"Yes! She says as long as men only ask for her hand as a partner to dance with—she is fond of dancing—or as a partner at tennis it's all very well, but another kind of partner she could not endure."

"Then your post is likely to be a tedious one, Mrs. Clare, unless, as is to be hoped, you don't hold such heretical ideas on the subject of marriage." And he looked at her with bold interrogation.

Mrs. Clare smiled, pretended to be a little shocked, and looked down and simpered, and glanced up through her eyelashes.

"Hush!" said someone near them, "Miss Darvall is going to sing."

And so she was, to her guitar and a piano accompaniment. As she stood up beside the instrument before the whole room, every eye was fixed upon her with admiration. The tall, *swell* figure, the grace of her pose, with her guitar suspended over her shoulder by its gaudy-scarlet ribbons, made a remarkably striking picture.

After a few preliminary chords she began to sing, and what a voice! The lark-like trill, educated to a drawing-room mezzo-soprano, it was a clear, rich flood of melody that touched all alike, and went straight to the hearers' hearts.

The song she sang was a sad, wild, Creole love song, full of fire and pathos, and with a refrain that dwelt long after in people's ears, whether they would or no.

Captain Elliot listened to her in profound amazement. This accomplishment was not a mere accomplishment in the common acceptance of the term; it was a gift, a talent to entrance a multitude, a fortune in itself. Had she nothing but her voice to recommend her, that alone would exalt her and raise her above the ordinary level of her class, whether of gardener's daughter or great heiress.

Mrs. Clare watched his face of wrapt attention out of the corner of her eyes, and when the buzz of applause was over she said, carelessly,—

"Sings charmingly. Does she not?"

"Yes, she has what is called 'le voix d'or,' or golden voice."

"She ought to sing, you know. Her mother was a singer—a chorus singer—a very common person."

"Really! But if she sung like her daughter, she had not a common voice."

"Mary practises a great deal! Of course that goes a long way."

"Of course, practice makes perfect," said her companion, aloud. To himself, "I don't fancy Mrs. C. is very fond of her dear young friend with all her ecstasies."

The next morning, Mary, who was late for breakfast, found herself sitting next to Captain Elliot, who acknowledged her good-morning with a very stiff bow, and was wholly taken up with his other neighbour, a pretty little girl with a wonderful fringe.

Previously to her arrival he had noted three

letters lying on her plate, and each addressed in a masculine hand. How was he to know that one was from Humpty, one from her lawyer, and one an invitation to a ball at Shorncliffe?

During the morning he strolled about the grounds, at first with his cousin Sophy, and then with Mrs. Clare, who had marked him, for her own; and once he came and sat beside her, or walked with her—was as a very octopus, and would not release him for hours.

For two or three days he allowed himself to be monopolized for reasons of his own. He heard a great deal about Mary—(not always to her advantage. Mrs. Clare understood the art of "faint praise")—Mary, whom he avoided, though he watched her pretty closely.

She played tennis with great zeal and ability. She walked about—now with one man, now another. She had a train of respectful admirers. No one was singled out, no one was exceptionally favoured! She drove and danced, and played and sang, and conducted herself much as other girls; and certainly no one would have guessed from her manner that she had ever met Captain Elliot before, or that she was, secretly, furiously jealous of his attentions to Mrs. Clare.

"Better far," she said to herself, "he had gone away, than to sit spooning under the trees, or walking in the moonlight with that bold, detestable woman!"

Three days elapsed and he had never spoken to her, which she hoped had not been remarked by others; for among all her conflicting feelings, remors, wounded vanity, pride, jealousy, was a consuming fear that the outer world guessed that there was some secret between them!

She had made up her mind to treat him to a Roland for his Oliver, and was wondering to which of her admirers she would be unusually gracious—Captain Durand for choice.

Accordingly, that same evening she walked out in the grounds with him, after dinner, by moonlight. Other couples frequently did the same—her husband and Mrs. Clare for one—but hitherto she had refrained. Now she would do as others did, and amuse herself, and see what would be the result.

So she strolled up and down a long walk, well commanded by the rustic seat, on which reposed Captain Elliot and his companion, and talked and laughed, and made a very good imitation of a *princesse* flirtation.

She also sat in a corner with Captain Durand afterwards, when they had all returned indoors, and refused to play nap or to make herself agreeable to anyone but her present partner on the sofa!

She saw Mrs. Clare staring at her with a gaze of exhaustive surprise. She saw Captain Elliot accord her one long look of steady disapproval, and felt that her Roland was beginning to be felt; but she was exceedingly astonished when, Captain Durand having quitted his seat to fetch her a book of photographs, it was instantly taken by her husband.

"I hope you are enjoying yourself!" he said.

"Immensely! And you?"

"Oh, of course! I've come over to give you a word of advice," lowering his voice.

"Thank you!" rather scornfully.

"It is this!" holding out a volume. "Do not leave your love-letters lying about in books; they may be very interesting to you, but they only afford an amusing study to other people."

"Love-letters!" she echoed, blushing scarlet. "What do you mean! I never got one in my life!"

"Then what is this!" suddenly opening the book, "I was looking over this, and came upon it. Luckily for you it was no one else!"

Mary looked and saw an open sheet between the pages—a few lines she had received a few days previously.

"DEAR MARY," it began, "your long letter was most welcome. I miss you more than you would believe, or I would have believed myself. I am counting the days till you come back. Do not stay longer than a week, and, meantime, write as often as possible to your disconsolate

"HORACE."



AFTER A FEW PRELIMINARY CHORDS MISS DARVALL BEGAN TO SING.

"I suppose your disconsolate Horace is the gentleman who was good enough to impart instruction to you, and to give you the ten-pound note!"

"What a capital memory you have!" she replied, coolly. "He is one and the same person!"

"I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself!"

"Ashamed! Why—why should I be ashamed! Shall I tell you who he is?"

"Don't trouble yourself. I know. He is your lover!"

"He is nothing of the sort!" she replied, indignantly. "I had a lover once. I never want another!" looking straight into his angry dark eyes. "He was a wretch!"

"So he was," he acquiesced. "I admit that. There was no defence for him but his temper!"

"He could not have cared a straw for me!"

"Perhaps not. He was a hot-headed young fool!"

Mary was completely taken aback by his style of conversation, and, after a moment, she said,—

"How"—tapping it—"did you know that it was my book?"

"By seeing your name in it. Mary V. Darvall. What is V for?"

"Veronica—my grandmother's."

"What a hideous name!"

"Not worse than Maxwell! But listen to me for one second. That letter is from one of my very few friends, and from the best of them all!"

"Oh, of course, that is understood!"

"He is an old man—nearly seventy. He has a hump on his back. He was my grandfather's secretary. His name is Horace Montagu."

"By Jove! I remember that there was such a person long ago, when I was a boy, and he used to frighten me, rather, with his bushy eyebrows and his sharp tongue. I did not know that he was still alive."

"Yes; he frightens me, too, now and then; but he is very good to me. It is owing to him

and his exertions that I am no longer a gate-keeper at Danesford."

instead of an accomplished, well-born, beautiful heiress!"

"Exactly so."

"I suppose you like the change?"

"I do, very much—naturally."

"Where did you pick up Mrs. Clare?" glancing over at that lady.

"Mr. Montagu—Humpy, as I call him—picked her up. He said I must have a chaperon. He settles all my affairs, and really is my best friend."

"How did you first come across him?"

"In the old shell-house, where I ran in for shelter one day. It was there he used to teach me, four times a week."

"I see you are largely indebted to him. May I ask if he knows everything? Does he, for instance, know about me?" looking at her keenly.

"Yes," blushing. "I do not know how he discovered it, but he does! He said he remembered you well as a little boy on a white pony."

"So I had a white pony, now that I come to think of it. Egad, I begin to believe you!"

"Begin to believe me, sir!" she exclaimed, rising from her seat with a white face.

"Stay—stay! Listen to me for a moment, Mary. At first I thought it was all a well got up story. You see, Horace is a sort of fancy name; the fellow writes a— a young hand, and—and—you are so—well, lovely—so that it seems incredible that you have not a lover, especially as no one knows that you are not free to give your hand to whom you please!"

"I suppose you judge me by what you do yourself, Captain Eliot!" she said, in a withering tone.

"No, I declare! No! I most solemnly swear to you. I have flirted!"—and he paused.

"Oh, yes, you have flirted! I can see that for myself!"

"But"—colouring—"I've never really given a serious thought to another woman since that

day when John Meadows descended upon us in Cargort woods!"

"Another woman! But you were only amusing yourself with me then. It was, although I did not know it, play to you and death to me!"

"I really liked you, and was fond of you in my way—as one likes a pretty child. I did not mean to marry you; but I meant you no harm. Nor did I ever, by word, or deed, or look, say or do anything to bring a blush to your face. That is to say"—suddenly correcting himself—"bar a few kisses!"

"Bar a few kisses!" echoed Mrs. Seymour.

"Upon my word, Max, I must look after you. I cannot have you talking to my young friends in this style. Really I am amazed at you—are you not, Mary? What on earth does he mean by 'bar a few kisses!'"

Mary makes no answer whatever, and, turning, walked away.

(To be continued.)

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MR. GRAHAM PRODUCED SIR REGINALD'S WILL, AND HIS CLIENT TORE IT INTO SHREDS.

ORDEAL BY FIRE.

CHAPTER XIX.

HAROLD DYNEVOR was not doomed to a life-long sorrow. Having fixed his affections on one woman he had not the misery to see her die before his eyes without ever tasting the happiness he longed to shower upon her.

When the crisis of Nan's illness came, the change was for life not death. She opened her beautiful eyes, and fixing them on his face, spoke his name. No sound could have been sweeter to his ears than that one trembling word.

"Harold."

"My darling."

He was at the bedside in a moment, holding her thin hand in both of his, while his hot tears fell on it. He was not ashamed of them; he cared nothing that the Italian doctor and the sister of mercy were looking on; he had room but for one thought, Nan was given back to him, as it were, from the gates of death.

Her eyes sought his questioningly. The old doctor put one hand anxiously on his shoulder and whispered in French (Harold was not equal to Italian), "If you have bad news tell it her now while she is too weak to trouble; anything is better than for her to worry her brain with questions."

"What is it, Nan?" asked Harold, tenderly.

"The burning ship," a tremor passed over her as she spoke the words. "Idonie, Harold, what has happened, tell me!"

"My dearest, you and I were picked up by a small Spanish steamer, she landed us here at this little Italian town whose very name I had never heard before. You were ill, and there was no doctor on board, it seemed better to bring you to the first place where you could be nursed and taken care of."

"And Idonie?"

His silence must have told her the truth, and yet she repeated her question.

"Dear, try and be comforted; remember everything possible was done for her, had Sir Denzil been on board he could not have taken more care of her, she had a place in the first boat that got off."

"And it was lost?"

"Only two of the sailors survived."

Nan broke into a passion of tears. The doctor poured out some medicine and made her drink it. Harold bent over her tenderly.

"Dear, do not grieve so, you have me left, Nan try and get well for my sake."

She did not answer him, he watched by her side for some minutes in cruel suspense, then she sank into a peaceful slumber, and the old doctor half led, half dragged Dynevor from the room.

"You must go to bed," he commanded, "you have had no sleep for nights, and your wife will want you when she wakes."

Harold would have declared himself unconscious of fatigue, but when the doctor had shut him into the narrow room allotted to him he threw himself on the bed, dressed as he was, and slept as soundly as a child, that deep, dreamless sleep which follows long hours of grief or anxiety.

The sun was streaming into the room when he awoke, and the good-natured hostess stood beside him holding a tray of coffee and rolls, with a beaming face.

"She sleeps still," says the Signora Gabrilli, "the doctor has been already, and says all is well."

His toilet made, and the simple meal partaken of, after a hasty glance at his dear invalid, Harold Dynevor went out into the sunshine.

The inn was too small and primitive to afford him a private sitting-room, he wanted to be alone with his thoughts, he had so much to plan and arrange now that the great fiat had gone forth, and Nan was to live.

While she lay in great peril of death, Dynevor had lost sight of all the little difficulties in their path, the broken laws of society's code which they had been compelled to outrage. He wanted

before the strangeness of their position dawned on Nan to have every arrangement made for their speedy wedding.

It was impossible that they could return to England until Nan was Mrs. Dynevor; the ceremony must perforce take place abroad. Harold knew singularly little about the English law as it related to matrimony, but he had a vague belief that wherever there was a British consul, that functionary could lawfully marry two of his own compatriots. Genoa seemed to him the nearest place where this much to be desired consul could be found. If there was an English clergyman there too, he would, perhaps, consent to read the marriage service over them after the consular ceremony, not as a legal necessity, but as a kind of consolation to Nan for being deprived of so many bridal adjuncts.

Clearly the first thing to do was to write to Genoa, a letter addressed to the consul would doubtless be delivered, though he was quite uncertain of the name of that gentleman. The ceremony once over he and Nan would travel to the south of France, and spend some months there, he would require to take up his new duties in September, and it would be desirable before then to find a house near London and furnish it, but for the present there was no need to return to England, and for every reason he preferred to keep Nan abroad until her health was completely re-established.

While reviewing the future he did not forget the Trefuils family and the claims Nan might think they had upon her for details of that ill-fated voyage, but it seemed to Harold far better that his wife should not seek out Sir Denzil's relations; there was nothing she could tell them of Idonie which would raise their opinion of that ill-fated little beauty. Far, far better not to lift the veil which concealed her last folly. For Nan's sake he did not wish her to dwell on her sister's loss, and for the sake of Idonie's memory it was best that none should ever know of the girlish frolic which made her change names with her sister.

"Nan and I shall be fairly well off, but not nearly rich enough to be equal to Sir Denzil Trefusis; very likely, too, he would look down on me as a plain business man. There's nothing likely to take us in the neighbourhood of Trefusis, and surely England is large enough for us not to run against any member of the family. I had thought of going down to Weston to see my godfather; but as it is only an easy drive from Trefusis, I will steer clear of him. He won't regret it I dare say, a godson is not a very near tie; and now he has lost his only son he might think I was after his money-bag."

Nan picked up her strength wonderfully; but, of course, after such an illness, it was weeks before she was allowed to travel, and May was half-way through before Harold had his heart's desire, and they two were man and wife. The ceremony, after all, did not take place at Goden but at Naples, and it was performed with every essential to its legality. In fact, as a young English doctor, who was one of the witnesses, told Mr. Dynevor afterwards, it couldn't have been more binding if it had been solemnized in Canterbury Cathedral by the Primate of all England.

Mr. and Mrs. Dynevor travelled to France by leisurely stages, and finally took up their abode at St. Malo, where Harold said they would spend the three months' holiday which remained before they must think of settling themselves near London.

"You know, Harold, I am quite well now, if you would rather go to England?" Nan said, when they were discussing this.

"You are much better," he said, fondly, "but you are not strong. I don't want you worried with the cares of housekeeping, or the pain of old associations yet; besides, Nan, we don't know when we shall get another chance of three months' idleness together. You are a most unmercenary girl, dearest. I don't believe you have ever troubled yourself about my income, and whether I shall be obliged to take you to an eight-roomed suburban house."

"I know I must have cost you a terrible lot of money, Harold," she said, wistfully.

"You cost me a terrible lot of anxiety," he retorted. "Nan, I hope you will never know such suffering as I went through in that little Italian inn, when I feared every hour might be your last. It seemed so cruel that I should only have found you to lose you again."

"It seems so wonderful that you should love me," she said, simply. "You know, Harold, I have been alone in the world so long, it is such happiness to belong to some one at last!"

"We were made for each other, Nan. I can't be sorry even for the terrors of that voyage on board the *Atlantica*, for it was that time which taught us really how much we cared for each other."

She was playing with the top button of his coat.

"I have done one thing, Harold, I am afraid perhaps you won't like. I wrote to Sir Denzil. You see," she went on, half-apologetically, "he had given Idonia into my care, and I thought I owed it him to tell him all I knew."

"Perhaps you were right," said Harold, thoughtfully; "but to me it seems like tearing open a wound afresh."

"I gave him this address" (they were staying in a charming *maisonnette* at St. Malo, with a French *bonne*, whose work was light, as they took their chief meals at an hotel). "I wonder if he will write!"

"He ought to," said Mr. Dynevor; "if he does not, you must make me a promise, Nan, never to try to renew your acquaintance with him. I am a proud man, sweetheart, and prouder for my wife even than for myself."

"I promise," she answered, gravely; "but all the same, Harold, I believe that he will write."

He never did write, and in her heart Nan thought his silence unkind. There was no one to tell her that Sir Denzil never had the letter. In reached Dolerabad to find him absent, and the coloured butler put it carefully away among a pile of other papers to await his master's return. By some strange chance, when Sir Denzil came home and asked for his correspondence, one of his

letters was left behind in the drawer, where they had been kept, and never reached his hands.

Nan wrote to her old friend, Helen Lester, but to her grief, the letter came back endorsed,—

"Gone away, no address."

After that Mrs. Dynevor decided to wait till she was in London. She knew the names of one or two papers for which her friend wrote, and she believed she could trace Nell by this means.

"Really," said Harold, quietly, "your efforts to renew old friendships are a failure, Nan. You will have to be content with me."

"I am more than content," she answered. "I believe that in spite of all we have gone through, this year has been the very happiest of my life."

"Shall we call at the Art Gallery when we get home?" demanded Mr. Dynevor, "and inform the old man there that you have found another situation in spite of his malice?"

"I think not; but Mr. Andrews is not nearly so bad as his son, Harold. I am sure he would never have sent me away if Tom had not worried him into it."

Harold smiled. He had heard the whole episode of Tom's courtship.

"Upon the whole, Nan, though I am quite sure Mr. Tom is an unmitigated cad, I feel rather grateful to him."

"Harold!"

"Well, dear, if it had not been for his persecution you would never have gone to India, and we should never have met."

Nan was wearing mourning for Idonia. Even in her own great happiness she could not forget the pretty childlike sister for whom she would gladly have laid down her life. Idonia's fate was still Nan's great sorrow; but for that her life would have been full of sunshine.

"Nan!" said her husband, one day, when they were beginning to think of returning to England, "what was your friend, Miss Lester's name?"

"Helen; but I always called her Nell. Oh, Harold! you don't mean that she is dead!" as Mr. Dynevor turned back to the printed page he was scanning.

"Deaths are not the only facts chronicled about the fair sex," he said, smiling; "listen and tell me if this is meant to refer to your friend."

"Well."

"We hear on good authority that a marriage is arranged between Douglas, third son of the late Sir Archibald Trefusis, baronet, and Miss Helen Lester, whose bright, chatty articles have so often graced our columns."

"What is the paper?"

"The *Piccadilly Chronicle*."

"It's Nell right enough! She used to say the *Piccadilly* was her backbone; but I never thought she would marry. And oh! Harold, I wish she was not going to enter that family."

"Douglas Trefusis is a barrister," said Dynevor, quietly. "If I remember right, Jim Adair claimed to be a great friend and old school-fellow of his."

"I wonder if Mr. Adair was saved!"

"No. He was in the same boat as your sister. He played a dastardly trick to get a seat in it. Well, it didn't profit him much. Don't look so troubled, Nan. Douglas Trefusis need not be like his friend."

"But I shall have lost my friend, Harold. After Sir Denzil's silence I can't seek to know any of his family, and Nell will be a member of it. I only hope," Nan added, softly, "it will be a happier marriage than the last in the Trefusis family."

"You have got me left Nan," said Dynevor, tenderly, "we shall have to put up with each other, little wife."

She did not tell him, as she had done many times before, that she wanted no one but him. She looked at him with a strange expression of wistfulness. There was joy, too, in her smile, and Dynevor felt pained.

"Can't you be content with me, Nan? Can't you be happy in the little home we are going to make just for our two selves?"

The lips parted in a smile, and then she laid her face on his shoulder.

"Should you mind, Harold, if it was not always just we two?"

He looked at her, and a light broke suddenly on him. He understood that the pretty English home would not only be brightened by his wife, but by-and-by, by a little child.

"Nothing could have made me happier, Nan," he whispered, fondly, and then his thoughts wandered to that lonely man in India—his own brother-in-law now—who had lost both wife and children. At that moment he pitied Denzil Trefusis more than he had ever done before.

They went home to England early in September, a good three weeks before Harold was due at the bank. He called on his future chief, and found him a pleasant, affable old gentleman, a bachelor, with no near relations. Hearing Mr. and Mrs. Dynevor were looking for a house he recommended them his own neighbourhood. He lived in an old-fashioned house at Kew, and he was quite sure they would find the locality all they could desire. The journey to and fro was nothing when you were used to it, and the river was a never-failing delight.

"Can we afford it?" Nan asked, simply.

"Remember, Harold, I don't want you to be extravagant for me. I could be quite content in an eight-roomed house at Brixton."

"But I couldn't," said Dynevor, frankly. "I consider you have had quite enough of hardships and poverty, Nan. I want the rest of your life to be all sunshine."

They went down to Kew, and after many inquiries they lighted on a picturesque old house near the river. It stood in a large old-fashioned garden fragrant still with late autumn flowers.

Harold was delighted with it, and would have closed the bargain on the spot, but Nan thought it too expensive.

"We know no one," she said, frankly. "What do we want with a drawing-room large enough to hold a hundred people?"

"Nan, you are horribly prudent."

"Don't settle yet," she pleaded, "take a day or two to think it over in. After our dear little home in St. Malo this seems a veritable mansion."

So they told the agent they would write in a day or two, and he replied civilly he could not have given them a positive answer about the house then, as there was a gentleman after it who had the promise of the refusal.

"It's Mr. Trefusis, the barrister. He is to be married in October, and he's taken a great fancy to the house. His only objection is the size; but he is to bring his fiancée to look at it to-morrow, and give me an answer then."

"Oh, Harold, if we had come just one day later we should have met Nell face to face."

Dynevor smiled.

"I am not a superstitious man, Nan; but it does strike me as strange how our life from time to time touches that of the Trefusis. I thought we had lost sight of them for ever, and yet they suddenly come under our notice again."

"I don't think Nell will take that house," said Mrs. Dynevor. "She is so fond of London she would think it too far away; but I suppose she will give up her literary work when she marries."

"Is Mr. Trefusis rich?"

"He has only his profession. None of the younger sons have any private property."

"I expect they will take the Rookery," said Harold, thoughtfully. "It's a good advertisement for a barrister to entertain, and your Nell might give garden parties that would be the talk of London in those dear old grounds. Don't set your heart on the Rookery, Nan, for I don't believe it will be ours."

"I should like to tell you something, only I am afraid you will laugh at me."

"Suppose you try me!"

"It was the last night we were on board the *Atlantica*. I had the strangest dream. You know I had no idea then that you cared for me."

"I believed you Sir Denzil's wife then," said Dynevor, smiling; "but I am very much afraid, Nan, that I cared for you all the same."

"Well, I dreamed that I was alone with some one in an old-fashioned garden. I could not see his face. I shall never forget that garden. It was shut in by a high brick wall. There was a lake with wild ducks on it. Then nearer the house came what looked like a plantation of roses."

There was a large lawn, just like velvet to the feet, and up and down it strutted a magnificent peacock. Beyond the lawn you caught glimpses of the house—an old red-brick building, with the walls half-covered in creepers. I had never seen such a lovely garden before, and while I was wondering where it was your voice said "all this is ours, Nan, yours and mine."

Mr. Dynevor did not laugh. His voice was very grave as he asked,—

"Where there two old yew trees at each corner of the lawn, cut into fantastic shapes? and was there a mulberry tree in the centre, with an old wooden seat running round the trunk of it?"

"Yes; Harold do you mean there really is such a garden, and you know where it is?"

"I played there often as a boy. Nan, you have described my godfather's garden just as I saw it last; but, sweetheart, it will never be yours or mine. He has a nephew who will naturally be his heir."

"I don't want it, Harold; but wasn't it a strange dream?"

"Very," said Harold gravely, and thinking in his heart that he would dearly have liked to give Nan such a home as his godfather's beautiful old place. "There's no understanding dreams, Nan, try as you will."

When they got home there was a black-bordered letter for Harold Dynevor, which had been sent on from the bank. It was very short, but, coming on the top of that conversation with his wife, rather startling.

"Messrs. Graham and Cox, lawyers, of Weston, begged to announce the death of their client Sir Reginald Fairfax, and to request the presence of Mr. Dynevor at the funeral, which had been fixed for the following Tuesday afternoon."

CHAPTER XX.

THINGS don't always happen as we expect them to in this world.

When Jim Adair turned away from poor Idonia he regarded it as his hour of triumph. He was about to denounce the girl whom he imagined had wronged him, and at the same time prove conclusively to Hilda Trefusis that she had no rival in his love. He regarded the afternoon's work as a first-rate business, and was quite satisfied with his share in it.

He had promised "Miss Lester" to wait till the next day before making his communication to the Rector, but he did not imagine the delay would make the least difference to his revenge. He was rather glad to defer the explanation until Douglas Trefusis should have gone back to London, for he did not feel quite sure his old schoolfellow would see things in the same light as he did.

He had not the faintest idea that there had been a listener to that stormy conversation in the rural lane. He never suspected that his uncle had been one of the guests at the Rectory garden party, and in leaving had passed near enough to where he stood with the little governess to hear a good deal of what they said.

Sir Reginald had taken a great fancy to little Miss Lester. He had discussed her with his old friend Lady Mary, and both had agreed that some heavy trouble was at the bottom of her pale face and frightened eyes. Sir Reginald had declared he would give a good deal to know who had dared to make that pretty child miserable, and, in fact, had taken such a warm interest in the mystery that Lady Mary had fancied if he had been twenty years younger he might have attempted to console her little friend himself.

And this man with his chivalrous respect for all womanhood, his deep pity for this lonely girl in particular, actually heard his own nephew taunting her with some secret in her past and threatening to reveal it to her employer.

Sir Reginald was not near enough to hear quite all. He did not catch the specific charge Jim brought against Miss Lester, but he did most thoroughly understand that his nephew knew some turned-down page in the girl's past, and was threatening her with its disclosure.

Sir Reginald rode home at a gallop, sorely

disappointed with his kinsman, yet thankful that he had discovered Jim's true character in time.

"And I would have had him marry Hilda. I would have left him master of Woodlake Priory. Thank Heaven, I know the truth in time."

"I shall not dine downstairs to-night, Jarvis," he told his butler. "You can bring me something cold up to my study. When Mr. Adair has finished dinner tell him I want to speak to him—not before, mind."

Sir Reginald was too hospitable to turn his nephew dinnerless from his house, but in his present mood he could not have broken bread with Jim, the effort would have choked him. Presently, when the Baronet had grown tired of waiting, Adair sauntered into the study. He sat down by the open window, and said with what he thought an ingratiating smile.

"Sorry you're not well, sir. I suppose the heat has bowled you over—I feel it a bit warm, even after India."

"I am perfectly well," replied his uncle, sternly, "and I did not send for you to discuss the weather. I want to tell you that you are a disgrace to the name you bear, and the blood which flows in your veins. I shall be glad if you will conclude your visit to me to-morrow morning, and never darken my doors again."

Jim stared at his uncle in amazement. Apart from his expectation from Sir Reginald, he had badly any private means. He had got on fairly well in his profession, but to advance in it meant a speedy return to India.

"Everyone has a right to know of what he is accused," Adair replied slowly, "my conscience acquits me of any wrong."

"Then it must be a remarkably tough one," declared his uncle. "I saw you with my own eyes speaking to a lady, and I heard you threaten her. Only cowards use threats to a woman, sir."

"This particular woman simply deserved all I said to her. She has treated me shamefully, and now she is masquerading at the Rectory under an assumed name; but Mr. Trefusis shall have his eyes opened to-morrow, and—"

"I don't care what she has done," said Sir Reginald, firmly. "I don't believe she has ever injured any one, poor little thing, and I won't have her driven from a house where she is at least trusted and kindly treated. Now, look here, Jim, I suppose you'll admit that I am a man of my word."

"Certainly, sir."

"Very well. Now take your choice. If you utter one single word to the Rector that makes Miss Lester less her present situation, I shall at once offer her another. If she is not good enough to teach the Trefusis children, I am quite disposed to believe that she is good enough to be my wife! Speak but one word to her detriment, and I ask her to be Lady Fairfax and mistress of Woodlake!"

Adair grew livid with rage.

"If you only knew the truth—"

"I know as much as I care to know," interrupted the Baronet; "for some reason or other little Miss Lester has offended you, and like a coward you wish to be revenged on her. Well I know that for months she has lived with the Trefusis family, respected and honoured by them all. I prefer their judgment to yours. Besides, I will never let a defenceless woman be wronged if I can help it. I can't force Archie Trefusis to see with my eyes and scorn your petty malice as I do, but I can provide that little girl with another home if you get her turned out of the Rectory, and mark my words, I will."

There came a deep, long silence. Jim Adair bit his lip impatiently, and began to wish he had not ridden over to Trefusis that afternoon.

"I am waiting for your decision," said his uncle, coldly. "Will you leave Miss Lester in peace, or will you force me to offer her the protection of my name and home?"

"You are miserably deceived, sir, I assure you. The girl is not worthy—"

Again he was interrupted.

"I do not wish to discuss Miss Lester's worth with you or anyone. Keep to the point and answer my question. Do you intend to try and prejudice the Rector against Miss Lester? If

you do, by George I'll ride over to Trefusis and propose to her to-night!"

"You have made it impossible for me to warn the Rector," said Adair, sullenly. "Of course, I can't drive you into the folly of marrying a girl like that."

"I suppose you will keep your word? I can depend upon you."

"My word has never been doubted yet," said Jim, hotly, "and now, having given way to your wishes, I suppose you are satisfied, and will not dismiss me from Woodlake!"

"You had better leave to-morrow. I'll order the dog-cart for the 9.30 train. You see, Jim, I should never feel easy that you were not persecuting that little girl if you stayed. I'll write you a cheque for fifty pounds; you can do a month at Dieppe or Trouville for that, and you'll find it better fun than staying here waiting for a dead man's shoes. I'll bid you good-night now, and as you're starting so early, you need not trouble to say good-bye in the morning. I'll send you the cheque presently."

The weather had changed in the night, and when James Adair had driven out of the Woodlake grounds, the prospect before him was a sea of mud. The heavy rain fell in torrents, and before they reached the station both he and the groom were decidedly wet.

By his master's private order, Andrew left the mare in charge of a boy, and went on to the platform. He stayed there till the train came in, then he watched James Adair enter a first-class carriage. Another moment and the engine had started. At least Adair had kept his word so far, that he had left Weston without an attempt to warn the Rector of Trefusis.

Sir Reginald waited till the afternoon, when the rain had ceased; then he had his favourite horse saddled and rode into Weston and on till he met Archibald Trefusis at the Rectory gate.

"Have you heard of the disaster and come to condole with us, Sir Reginald? It's a bad business, I fear, but I, for one, shall never believe anything against her."

"I have heard nothing," said Sir Reginald, helplessly, "please tell me quite plainly what you mean."

The Rector told his story. He and his wife had returned late from dining at River View, both were tired and had not even glanced on the hall table before going upstairs. He had opened the door with a key, the servants were long since in bed, and he and his wife went to bed without a suspicion that anything was wrong.

The first alarm came from nurse, when she brought up the letters and her lady's early cup of tea. She said she could not find Miss Lester, and her bed had not been slept in; at the same moment Nora, who had opened Idonia's letter before those that came by post, uttered a sharp cry. The Rector took the sheet of paper from her and read the girl's heart-broken farewell.

All they could think of had been done. Directly after breakfast Mr. Trefusis had been down to the station, he thought it was possible Miss Lester had left by the last train for London the night before. The porter then on duty declared positively that no lady travelling alone went by it, only three people joined it at that station, a lady with a baby in her arms, a country woman travelling with her and probably her nurse, and a rough farm labourer who was, however, only going as far as the nearest junction.

There had been a down train a few minutes earlier and a good many people went by that. There were three or four young ladies, he couldn't say where they went to. It was a slow train, stopping at every station. There had been an awful accident to the London train, and several people were injured, three killed.

Sir Reginald read Idonia's farewell letter, his blood boiled, for he knew that it was his own nephew's conduct which had driven her to flight.

"I can make nothing of it," said the Rector. "You see she says 'to-morrow you will know all,' and that she 'deceived us.' What is it we are to know? As to deception Nora and I both feel that if anyone ever did their duty faithfully in great things and small, Miss Lester did so from the hour she entered our house. She has been

the greatest help and comfort to my wife, the most patient caretaker of our little ones."

"I suppose," said Sir Reginald, slowly, "there was a secret in her past."

"If so it did us no wrong; we never inquired into her past. A clergyman's wife testified to her respectability: her sweet temper and her blameless life were her best credentials."

"If there was a secret in her life," said the Baronet, "depend upon it someone who knew it, came here suddenly and met her. He may have threatened to tell you everything, and she, afraid of your dismissing her, took the initiative of dismissing herself—what does your wife say?"

"That nothing will induce her to believe a word against Miss Lester. My sister, Hilda, is even more positive. Her theory is that the poor girl had a worthless husband from whom she was separated, that he turned up suddenly yesterday, and threatened to come to the house to-day and claim his wife. Hilda declares that as Rector of the parish I could not have hidden a fugitive wife, and that Miss Lester, rather than place me in an embarrassing position, departed."

"I'd like to have the handling of the man who threatened her," said Sir Reginald.

"Punishing him would do her no good. She is so young, little more than a girl; she has the fatal dower of beauty. What can she do alone and friendless?"

"I think," said Sir Reginald, slowly, "I should advertise, but only of course if you are prepared to take her back."

"We are quite prepared to do that. Nurse is a trustworthy woman, and has so managed that none of the other servants know how strangely Miss Lester left the Rectory. We would take her back to-morrow, poor girl, or if the man she fears having seen her here this house is no longer a safe refuge for her I would find her another home and do it gladly, for the sake of my own little children."

"You're a good fellow, Archie," said the old man, simply. "Now I'll tell you something; I have the strongest interest in little Miss Lester, and I do believe if you had been too angry to take her back, I should have tried to find her on my own account, and ask her to be Lady Fairfax."

"It's just like you," said Archie, smiling. "Now will you come into the house and help me to compose an advertisement? You see we want it to catch her eye, but we must not put enough to enlighten the world at large as to what has happened."

And the result of their consultation was the following advertisement. It would have brought balm to Lionel's aching heart if she had seen it; but she was past all power of speech and thought, she still lay unconscious, under the care of the vicar's wife, when it appeared in the agony column.

"LESTER. If the young lady who left a country Rectory last Tuesday will send her address to her friends there all can be arranged; or if she will return to them a hearty welcome awaits her."

"The 'Lester' tells nothing," said Sir Reginald, "people will think that it means the town Leicester, and that the young lady left her home there. No; I can't stay to tea, thanks, I have business in Weston, which can't possibly be delayed."

"Is your nephew still with you?"

"He left this morning. Archie, I am a foolish old man, and I had set my mind on marrying your sister, Hilda. I even took her to task for snubbing Jim."

"So did my mother, I fancy."

"Well, it's hard work to have to speak against my own flesh and blood; but I've come to be thankful Hilda's decision was what it was. I wouldn't see her Jim's wife now for the gold of the Indies. You can tell her so if you like, with my love."

"I will. I fancy Hilda has fretted over your coolness. She is very fond of her godfather."

"She's the best girl in the county," said Sir Reginald, heartily. "Well, I must be off. Write

to me as soon as you have news of the fugitive. The advertisement is sure to bring her back."

Arrived in Weston Sir Reginald drove straight to his lawyers. The senior partner, Mr. Graham, had been his friend ever since their school-days, and he trusted him implicitly.

"Whatever's brought you here at this hour?" asked Mr. Graham, "another five minutes, and I should have been gone."

"I want you to stay long enough to make my will. I don't care how short it is. You can take it down on half a sheet of notepaper, if you like."

"But you made it only six weeks ago, and Fairfax, old friend, you can't draw up a will in half-an-hour."

"If you won't do it I'll go to Morton over the way. I tell you, Graham, there's no sleep for me till the thing's done. I shall not have an hour's peace while I know that my death would make James Adair master of Woodlake."

Mr. Graham produced Sir Reginald's most recent will, and his client tore it into shreds.

"Have you quarrelled with Mr. Adair?" the lawyer inquired.

"No; but my eyes are opened, and I see him as he is. A pretty master he'd make for Woodlake. Graham, why did you let me be such an idiot as to make him my heir?"

Graham had taken a clean sheet of foolscap, and a new pen.

"Look here, Sir Reginald, you might just tell me the provisions of the new will, and I'll write them down briefly. Then if it's signed and witnessed it will answer all purposes till you can make a more detailed document."

Probably, in that office, no will had ever been made so quickly. Sir Reginald never hesitated in his directions, and the lawyer took them down speedily.

Briefly the new will ran thus: Every servant ten years in Sir Reginald's employ received fifty pounds, the others twenty. Mr. Graham, the Rector of Trefusis, and Lady Mary, each received five hundred pounds as a mark of sincere friendship. A further sum of ten thousand was left to the Rector and Mr. Graham to hold in trust, and pay the interest in equal shares to Hilda Trefusis and Miss Lester, lately residing at Trefusis Rectory as governess; and if either of the young ladies married, her half-share, that is the principal representing it, was to be settled on her for her private use. Then the estate of Woodlake, with all its revenues, plate, furniture, and jewels. All the testator's ready money, all his invested funds, went to his godson, Harold Dynevor, whom he also appointed his legatee.

Two clerks came in from the outer office to witness Sir Reginald's signature. When they had departed he turned to his friend.

"Is it legal?"

"Perfectly. I never drew up a plainer will. Shall I keep it here or would you rather have it in your possession?"

"I prefer you to keep it," and Sir Reginald shuddered as he thought James Adair would be capable of destroying it if he suspected the contents. In any sudden illness of his uncle he took up his abode at Woodlake.

"You'll feel easier now it's made," said the lawyer; "but I hope with all my heart it will be many a year before it has to be acted on; and I think it will. You are a younger man for your years than I am."

"I never felt better in my life," said Sir Reginald; "but I should have had no peace if I had felt my death would make Jim Adair master of Woodlake."

And three weeks later day for day Mr. Graham had the sad task of sending out the invitations to his old friend's funeral. Sir Reginald caught cold, it turned to inflammation of the lungs, and he died on the very day on which half-an-hour later James Adair arrived at Woodlake with all the assurance of its acknowledged heir.

(To be continued.)

GERONIC INDIGESTION and its attendant Misery and Suffering Cured with Tonic "DOCTOR" (purely vegetable), 2/6, from Chemists, 5/6, post free from Dr. ROSE, "Glandower," Bournemouth. Sample bottle and pamphlet, with Analytical Reports, 6/6, 6 Stamps.

A DISHONOURD NAME.

—10:—

(Continued from page 559.)

It was all dark and eerie, no scrap of light shone from the crevices. A stillness like the stillness of the grave reigned around. Ronayne began to think he might have been deceived, but on trying the door he found it was securely fastened on the inside.

Judging from the circumstance that the man he sought was there he cautiously knocked, but there was no response. He knocked louder, but with like result; then he tried what had once been the window of the miserable hut, but was now simply an aperture boarded over. Forcing one of the planks aside he called, in a subdued voice,—

"If anybody is in there he need not fear to show himself. I come about the ransom of the child, and I swear that I have no officers with me, only a portion of the money."

From the silence that followed this speech Percival thought that Hackett would not show himself, or that perhaps he did not intend to pass the night there, and had only mentioned the hut as a meeting-place where he could receive the money. He was debating as to what he should do when he fancied he heard a slight movement inside the hut.

"Hackett," he said, "if you are there, I swear that you shall go unmolested if you deliver up the child. I have some of the money here."

"Have you!" suddenly exclaimed a voice. "Then I may as well have it at once. Take that for being such a fool as to come when I expressly told yer wife what it would be if she sent anyone but 'erself."

A flash of light through the displaced plank, a report, and Ronayne staggered back, placing a hand to his side.

"Coward!" he exclaimed, bitterly, "to shoot a man unawares like that; but what else could I expect? I was a fool to trust you."

"You were, indeed," grinned the ruffian, unbarrying the door, and coming out with a lantern in his hand. "I thought as 'ow it would be something like this. I knew that silly woman 'ud tell you, and that your love for that curly-wigged brat would fetch you. Well, yer see, I shall get wot money yer 'ave, and yer won't get the brat."

"Scoundrel!" said Ronayne. "I could shoot you where you stand, only—"

"Armed, are you?" quoth the ruffian, stepping back a pace. "I didn't know that, or I shouldn't have shown myself so soon. Confound the bad light; I meant to kill yer, and I may do it yet. Oh! yer getting yer barker out, are yer? I'll trouble yer for that," and with one bound he was upon the wounded man, who with difficulty kept himself erect, and wrenching the revolver from his grasp he hurled him to the earth. "Ha! ha!" he grinned, gazing down at the prostrate man with malicious satisfaction. "She loves you best, therefore you shall die. What care I for the brat? I tell you I love your wife, and she shall be mine. I shall take the brat back myself, perchance she'll look kindly on me then. I'll console your lovely widder, never fear; she's my old flame you know, and wimmen allus comes back to their first loves."

Ronayne struggled to his feet, and tried to spring upon the fiend who taunted him; but the effect was too much. He sank back upon the ground and fainted away.

"That's 'ow yer ought to be," Hackett said, coolly, as he rifled his victim's pockets. "Now to lock him up in the hut while I pays 'is lovely widder a visit."

Snuffing the action to the word, he dragged the inanimate form into the hut.

"Wot about the kid?" he mused, as he was busy with his task; shall I take 'im or leave 'im? Leave 'im 's best, I think; the drops 'll keep 'im quiet, an' 'is mother 'll stump up more if she doan't see 'im."

Holding up the lantern he threw its light upon a heap of rags in one corner, where, lying in a drugged sleep, was the baby heir of Ronayne.

his downy, rosebud cheeks all dirty and blistered from the tears he had shed, until the oplate had made him oblivious of his woes.

"E's all right!" muttered, Hackett. "I'll look 'em both up safe till I can return."

He fastened the door and set out on his walk to Ronsayne Court. It was past midnight when he arrived, and he skulked about till he was sure that all the servants had retired to rest.

In his former spyings upon Alida he had made himself acquainted with her habits, and knew that she spent a great many hours in her boudoir. Seeing that a light was still burning there, he cautiously peered in, and saw, as he had expected, that she was there alone. He tapped softly at the window, for he did not wish to alarm her and rouse the servants.

Alida rose hastily, and unlatched the window; she thought it was her husband.

"Percival, dear—" she commenced, then started back as Hackett seized her wrist.

"Not a word!" he hissed, "if you value your life or that of your kid!"

By an effort Alida conquered a strong desire to cry out.

"Where is my child!" she managed to articulate calmly.

"Safe an' well, with 'is pa," he returned with a leer.

"Thank Heaven!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands. "Then you have seen Percival—but why, why is he not here?"

"Wal, yer see, I thout I'd come first, an' prepare you for 'is comin'. The fact is, he 'adn't quite money enough, and he up an' tells me to come to you. You're to bring the rest 'o the money, or jewels, if you like an' come with me to meet 'im an' the kid."

"You are telling me lies!" she said, all her suspicions roused by this unlikely tale. "Oh, Heaven! my husband—if you have harmed him—"

"Wot then?" he asked, savagely, as he marked her agony, and ground his teeth, to think how well she loved the man he had laid low. "Listen! You spurned me, but I've had my revenge! Would you like to know 'ow I left your precious 'usban'?" forgetting all caution in his jealous rage. "How did you leave him?" she asked, steadily, though there was a ring in her voice that might have warned him, had he been less intent upon his revenge.

"Well, I left 'im pretty quiet—'im an' the kid too—in the 'ut. The kid squealed, so I guv 'im some drops to quiet 'im; but your 'usban' required sterner measures!"

"What did you do to him?" fixing her glittering eyes upon him.

"I left 'im with an ounce or two o' lead in 'is carcass, an'—"

He was interrupted by Alida.

"Murderer!" she screamed; "you shall not escape!"

She seemed transformed by love and fury, and before he understood or could prevent her, she tore violently at the bell, and seizing him with her delicate fingers, into which despair seemed to have infused the strength of a giant, she held him till help came.

"Let me go, or it'll be the worse for you," he snarled, making desperate efforts to escape from her clinging fingers, but with the tenacity of despair she clung to him till the alarmed servants rushed into the room.

"This man has murdered your master—secure him!" she said, in piercing accents; and when this had been accomplished,—"Some of you come with me to the witch's hut," she continued.

Hardly could she wait while a carriage was got ready, so terrible were her fears and dread of the worst. Though the servants shared the common dread of the witch's hut, they all volunteered to go with their mistress.

Choosing some and leaving others to guard the prisoner, Alida set off to find what she feared and dreaded would be the body of her husband.

Arrived at the hut, no time was lost in breaking down the door. To her joy she heard the childish voice of her boy calling—"Mummy's tum; mummy's tum!" as the door gave way, and dirty, torn, and tear-stained as he was he was convulsively stretched to her breast.

"Pip's there," he said, presently; "he spoke to me in the dark, when I woke up, and was afraid; but, mummy, he's gone to bye-bye again."

Gently setting the child on his feet, Alida flew to her husband's side. The child's words had given her hope that he might still be alive. Leaning over him and kissing his pale face, she called upon him in every endearing term to look up and speak to her.

Her voice seemed to have power to bring back his wandering senses; his eyes opened, and he smiled up into her face.

"You here, darling," he said, faintly. "The child is safe?"

"Yes, Percival; but, my dear one, you are hurt," anxiously bending over him.

"Not much, Alida," he said, reassuringly, trying to rise. "The villain's aim was bad in the dark; it was the loss of blood made me faint. I think, with a little help, I shall be able to walk home."

"The carriage is not far," she answered, placing an arm around him, while the butler supported him on the other side.

"What a brave little woman you are, Alida!" he said, when, with the rescued child, they were slowly on their homeward way. "You have saved my life."

"Ah, Percy," she said, tenderly, "I am so thankful you are not dead! From what Hackett said, I thought he had murdered you; and I could not live without you."

"Darling," he whispered, "I believe I am still first in your eyes! I shall never be jealous of this young tyrant again."

"You are my first, you will be my last love," she cried, passionately. "I love the child because he is yours; but, oh! my husband, I love you best of all the world."

"I know it, Alida," he returned, stooping to kiss her. "But how did you know that I was wounded?"

"Hackett came, dear, and he is now secured; but here we are at home. I will tell you all another time. Now I must get you to bed and send for a doctor."

Percival made no opposition, for he still felt weak and faint. Much to Alida's satisfaction the doctor reported that the wound, though severe, was not dangerous, that all he required was rest and quiet, and in a fortnight's time he was convalescent.

The child did not seem to have suffered much from his enforced absence from his mother. He was as gay and lively as ever; but Alida could not get over the fright she had had, and in spite of Bertie's entreaties and promises to be wonderfully careful if he was allowed to have charge of his nephew, she could not be prevailed upon to let her treasure run the risk a second time.

Hackett was handed over to the police, and was sentenced to penal servitude for life. Whether in a fit of remorse or not was not known, but he confessed that it was he who forged the cheque, of which crime Morton Palatret had been accused, and that it was in consequence of that accusation that the broken-down gentleman, whose brain was weakened by his misfortunes, has committed suicide.

"You were right, Alida," Percival said, when he heard the statement, "that man was morally the murderer of your father. He led him from bad to worse; but, in spite of his fall, my estimate of my old friend was pretty correct, for your unfortunate father, low as he had fallen in the social scale, and wrong as suicide must ever be, yet chose it rather than live dishonoured. Like the race of Ronsayne he preferred Death before Dishonour!"

[THE END.]

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IF I BUT KNEW.

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CHAPTER XXXI.—(continued.)

RHODA looked about her at the magnificent home—a huge pile of granite, like some old medieval castle, with its spacious verandas, its gables, and its turreted windows ablaze with light. Climbing roses all in bloom seemed to almost cover the porches.

A velvety sweep of lawn, with statuettes gleaming white through the greenish bloom of the shrubbery, and a wonderful fountain, greeted her. It was a veritable paradise on earth to which she, an unwelcome bride, had come.

She did not have time to utter the cry of delight that involuntarily rose to her lips, even though it would be stifled at its birth by a sigh of keen regret, ere a group of the servants rushed forward to meet the approaching carriage.

In the midst of all this splendour how lonely Rhoda's heart felt. Owen sprang from the carriage and held out his hand to assist her to alight. When his hand touched hers, she could feel, even through her glove, how cold it was.

No loving pressure reassured her; he barely touched her finger-tips.

It seemed to her that she passed through a sea of faces. She heard scores of voices bidding her welcome, and crying out,—

"Long live the happy bride!"

She made no attempt to speak. If she had done so, she would have lost control of herself in a passionate flood of tears.

She blushed as she wondered what they would say if they knew her story—that she was desolate and lonely in the midst of it all.

It was a gay crowd that had gathered beneath the roof of Owen Courtney's home. There were nearly a thousand guests. Beautiful women in shimmering silks and costly gems, and gallant men with patrician faces.

How strangely ill at ease Rhoda felt as she entered the brilliant reception-room leaning on her husband's arm. She seemed strangely out of place in her brown travelling dress.

If she could have found but one familiar face, how thankful she would have been! She could not even creep closer to the man whose name she bore, but from whom she seemed so far apart.

The magnificent reception went on, and music and merriment resounded. But they came to an end at last, as all things earthly must do.

The last guest had departed, and out on the lawn and in the brilliant corridors the servants were putting out the lights one by one.

"You have gone through the ordeal bravely," Owen said. Rhoda did not answer, lest she should burst into tears. "You must be very much fatigued. Mrs. Rice, the housekeeper, will show you to your suite of rooms. My rooms are in another wing of the house. If you want anything, Mrs. Rice, whose apartments are across the corridor, will attend to you."

The good old housekeeper was shocked when her master summoned her and told her of the arrangements he had made.

She looked at the face of the lovely bride, and wondered what it could all mean. She accompanied Rhoda to the magnificent suite of rooms that had been prepared for the occupancy of the bride and groom.

"I thought you would have brought a maid with you," said Mrs. Rice, apologetically, "or I would have had one here."

"It does not matter," said the young wife, wearily. "I am used to taking care of myself," she added, with a faint smile.

"You look very tired," said Mrs. Rice. "I would advise you to get some rest. Nothing refreshes one so much after a long journey."

Half-an-hour afterwards she stood in the spacious room alone, and she looked at herself in the tall mirror.

It was a pale face with wistful, shadowy eyes, that she saw reflected there. She wondered if any of the people had noticed how unhappy she was. She went to the window and looked out into the dewy freshness of the night. The

fragrance of the roses drifted into her, but it did not cool the fever of her brow. She wished to Heaven that she had not come here. She told herself that she must leave the place at once and for ever. Life beneath that roof would drive her to madness.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN less time than it takes to tell it, the strained relationship between Owen Courtney and his bride was whispered through the household. They had laughed at old Daniel when he had whispered the story of their alliance from the railway station, declaring he was romancing. Later events certainly gave colour to the story, however. She was all that was sweet and fair. What could be the trouble?

"If there was ever a bride most wretchedly unhappy, she is that one," said Mrs. Rice, shaking her head. "Why did he marry her if he did not love her? I cannot understand it, I am sure."

Mrs. Rice went to the bride's room the next morning to awaken her. She found her already up and sitting by the window, and there was no indication that she had removed her dress. This was reduced to a certainty when she went into the adjoining apartment and found the couch just as it had been the previous evening.

She went back to where young Mrs. Courtney was sitting, and laid her hand gently upon the girl's arm.

"I hope you will be happy with us here, my dear," she said, in her sweet, gentle old voice, "for we will do everything to serve you. I have been here for many years, and have witnessed the home-comings of many of the brides of the Courtneys. There was never one that I took to more than I did to you, my dear child. I felt like taking you in my arms and pressing you to my heart. But you seem lonely. Tell me, is there anything I can do for you?"

Rhoda lifted her face.

"You are very, very kind," she said, gratefully, "and I thank you with all my heart."

She looked as if she were about to add something, but quickly checked herself.

"Perhaps you would like to see the grounds, my dear," said Mrs. Rice. "Will you come out into the garden?"

The young woman acquiesced readily enough.

"Your trunks have not come yet, my dear," said Mrs. Rice, as they walked along. "The railway service in this part of the country is abominable. It looks strange to have you come down to breakfast in your travelling dress, but—"

"I have no trunks coming. This is the only dress I have to wear at present," returned the girl, quietly.

It was as much as the old housekeeper could do to restrain herself from an exclamation of astonishment at this announcement.

What could it mean? Why had Owen Courtney's bride no trousseau, as he had been preparing for this event for months, as eager in his anticipation of it as a schoolboy for a holiday? She could not understand it; she felt mystified. But with the quick wit habitual to her, Mrs. Rice replied almost instantly:

"A wardrobe can be easily supplied by our local modistes. Indeed, they are world famous, I may add. They make dresses for many of the ladies in London on the shortest notice. Mr. Courtney pressed a roll of notes into my hand when he arrived, and said: 'See my wife has everything needful, Mrs. Rice.' I could not think what he meant at the time. Now I see it was your wardrobe he referred to. You and I will set about getting the things at once. Or if it will fatigue you too much after your journey, you leave it to me, and I will see that you have a complete wardrobe in a short time. You must not say 'no,' my dear; for, remember, it is your husband's wish, and you surely wish to please him."

The girl looked at her with the strangest of expressions in her dark eyes.

"Nothing that I could do would please him," she said, hopelessly.

Mrs. Rice did not tell that remark to the servants, or there would have been no end of gossip among them.

"There is some great mystery between Owen Courtney and his bride," she said to herself. "I will not attempt to probe the mystery; but I will endeavour to bring them together, if it lies within human power."

The fortnight that followed, the old mansion was fairly alive with guests coming and going.

Owen could not help but admire Rhoda for bearing up so bravely under the terrible ordeal. During that fortnight a strange thing happened—the cruellest blow that Heaven could have dealt Rhoda. The lovely girl had learned to love Owen Courtney with all the strength of her nature. She was in love with him, and he was cold and indifferent.

She had first become conscious of this new love that had bloomed in her heart in quite a strange manner. She was talking with a young lady who had driven over from Oakdale, a few miles distant, to call upon her.

"You are not at all what I took you to be, my dear," the lady said, with a little laugh. "Owen—pardon me for calling him by that name, for we were playmates together—used to talk of you by the hour, dwelling on how he adored you. Somehow I gathered from his remarks that you were tall. He never told me your name. I actually believe that he was jealous of the sound of it upon any other lips except his own. When I saw you two standing together under the oak tree a few minutes since, I said to myself, 'what a perfect couple! How they must love each other! I think one can always tell when they see two together who are intended for each other.' Anyone could see that it was certainly intended that you two should meet and love each other."

White and trembling the young bride drew back. In some way that she could hardly understand that conversation formed an epoch in her life. A sudden sense of proprietorship came over her. Yes, fate had brought them together.

For some moments after her companion had left her she stood in silence amid the drapery of the bay window. Heaven had intended Owen Courtney and her for each other.

There came to her a sweet, sharp pain; a sudden gleam of happiness, a sensation that made her heart throb.

Looking from the window she saw Owen crossing the lawn with some of the guests. She watched him eagerly through the lace-draped window, herself unseen.

How tall, handsome, and graceful he was! It was then that the first thrill of love passed over her like the breath of a summer wind, leaving her faint and trembling; that love that was to be as strong as death, that was to leave all, bear all, conquer all, that was to crown her glorious womanhood, that was to attune her whole being in perfect harmony.

Another fortnight passed, and yet another. Everything at the great mansion passed pleasantly enough to the outside world. But the young girls for miles around who envied the young bride never dreamed of the skeleton that existed in that magnificent mansion.

Owen Courtney was all that was kind and considerate. It seemed a necessity to him to have the house full of company. He was never alone with Rhoda. How gaily he talked to his guests! Looking at him, Rhoda said to herself—

"If he would but smile so when he speaks to me! His eyes are always cold; no warmth or brightness ever comes into them for me."

Although Owen appeared so bright and gay before his guests, yet unknown to anyone, his heart was filled with the bitterness of death. It did not seem possible for him to live through the hours day after day. He felt thankful to Heaven that no one guessed that he had brought home a different bride from what he had intended. He dashed recklessly from one gaiety to another, his object being to try to forget Nina, his love. He never voluntarily looked at the girl he had married.

At the end of six weeks most of the guests returned to their homes, and Owen suddenly found himself alone with his young wife and the servants.

"I must not let this happen again," he said. "To live here alone requires more strength than I am possessed of."

They breakfasted alone in the great oak dining-room, and each felt the restraints which they could ill conceal.

As she took her place at the table she was perfectly calm and self-possessed, but the mask of smiles she had worn before his guests fell from her face. She did not attempt any conversation with him, but with a quick, flashing smile she answered when she was spoken to.

"It seems to take the servants exceptionally long to serve the breakfast," he said, impatiently; adding, "Will you permit me to glance over the morning paper? I am interested in this column on stocks."

She bowed her head gracefully, and watched him, as he read in silence. There came over her face an air of saddest pain to see in one so young.

To Rhoda the departure of the company was a great relief, indeed, she longed for solitude, and thought that if they did not go soon she could not keep up much longer.

She had wanted to go away long ago; but she had remained there, and now the attraction was so great that she could not break away even if she would. Her love for her husband was like a magnet, strong as her very life-blood, a part of every heart-beat.

For long hours she would muse over her strange position.

It was an uncommon fate—youth, with life all before her, she longed for its blessings. It was pitiful for her to know that the man she had learned to love cared for another, that she was no more to her husband than she would be to a brother.

How sad it was that she should long for the love of her husband as she had never longed for anything else in life! It seemed so strange to live in that magnificent home, to have everything that her heart desired, to be wealthy, honoured and envied, yet to have no husband's love.

Did he still sigh for Nina? Was he thinking of her when that dreamy look came into his eyes? She would give the whole world to know. She felt a terrible jealousy in her heart.

"Will he never change?" she asked herself in despair. "Living under the same roof with me, seeing me day after day, will his heart never warm over so little toward me?"

Once more the old resolve, to steal away from the house, came to her. Should she go to him, kneel at his feet, and sob out—

"I cannot remain in this house any longer, because I—I—have learned to love you!"

She could picture the surprise on his face. Perhaps there would be anger, scorn. The eagle dared to look at the sun, the worm dared to creep into the tender heart of the rose. Was it strange that she had dared to love him?

Here was a dreary fate, and she tried to bear, bravely. If she had only some one to confide in some one to talk to! Was his heart dead because of his bitter disappointment?

He asked her every morning, at the breakfast-table, if she had any particular wish for that day. If there was any place she desired to see. At first she said "yes," and went to the different places of interest near there. He accompanied her, but she could not help but see that he was greatly bored by these excursions. He did not attempt to converse with her as they rode along the country road those beautiful sunlit mornings.

She had everything she wished for—a magnificent home, servants, horses, jewels, silks, lace, everything which the heart of woman craved—but love—her husband's love.

He would have been astounded if anyone told him that the only thing to make her life happy was—his love.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ONE morning Owen informed his young wife at the breakfast-table that he had invited a party of friends and had just received a word that they would be with them that day. This was sorrowful news to Rhoda for she realized that she

would see less of her husband when they came. But she seemed to await their arrival in a fever of impatience.

While she was wondering how many there would be in the party, her husband said, as if in answer to the unexpressed thought—

"There will be six in the party—Mrs. Montague and her two daughters, Edith and Sophie, Captain Edmonds and George Dalrymple—and Honor Morland."

Rhoda looked up quickly as her husband pronounced the last name. Was it only her fancy, or did he turn away abruptly?

Somehow she could not rid herself of the fancy.

Then suddenly it occurred to her that she had heard the name, Honor Morland, before. She remembered the conversation well.

While their former guests were there, she had been sitting in the rose embowered veranda one day, while two of them passed on the lawn, and the fragments of their conversation floated up to her.

"I am surprised to find that Honor Morland is not here," said one.

"Indeed! I would have been more surprised if she had been here," said the other.

They were idle words, almost meaningless, as far as she was concerned, but the name, Honor Morland, clung to her for many days afterward. This was the last morning she would have with her husband. It was generally his custom to smoke in the grounds after breakfast. If she walked over the lawn she might be able to have a little chat with him.

She made a tour of the grounds, but to her surprise she did not see Owen. Perhaps he was detained in the library writing letters. A little brook ran through a far corner of the grounds, and on either side of it tall laurel bushes grew.

The laurels were all in bloom now, tossing their pink and white blossoms to the golden sunshine. Rhoda admired them greatly. She could not tell what prompted her to wander there on this fateful morning. She sat down on a mossy stone within the shadow of the beautiful laurels, and looked down into the limpid water.

"Oh, noisy babbling brook," she sighed, as she bent her beautiful, and young face over it, "you have rippled over your mossy bed for many a mile through mountains and valleys. You have rippled on past happy homes, lowly cottages, and stately mansions. Perhaps many young girls have bent their faces over you, as I am doing now, and whispered to you their hearts' secrets. To the brookside lovers always come, to whisper their vows, and women always come to sob out their disappointments. But surely no one ever came to you who was sadder than I. My life has been a wretched mistake from beginning to end. The saddest of all is the knowledge that I love one who is cruelly indifferent to me. And yet I cannot break away. Some young girls have had one ray of happiness in their lives, but I have not had even one."

Would life ever be any different for her? Would fate be always as unkind as now? Bitter tears, which she could not restrain, sprang to her eyes and coursed down her cheeks.

She tried to stop their flow, but she could not, though she realised that she would be a sorry object before her husband's guests. At that moment she heard the sound of footsteps.

Looking through the bushes she saw two of the servants walking leisurely along, one carrying a basket of newly gathered fruit, and the other a basket of freshly cut roses.

Was it fate that caused one of them to say,—"Let us not return to the house just yet. The morning is warm and fine, why not sit down here under the shade of this tree and tie the roses into bunches? I can do it as well here as in the house."

Whereupon they leisurely proceeded to seat themselves.

"It isn't the same house since master brought home his bride," said the other. "It's nothing but company, company, all the time. Now we are to have another new lot of guests."

"And guess who is invited this time," said her companion.

"Mr. Courtney seems to know everybody in

the country, so it would be a pretty hard guess," laughed the girl.

"Well," returned the other, "as you are not so good at guessing, I may as well tell you—it is Miss Honor Morland."

"Pray who is she?" asked the girl, who was tying the roses.

"Oh, I forgot you were not here long enough to know about her. Well, I will tell you. She is a young girl who lives a few miles away, in a magnificent house called Morland Castle. She is as beautiful as a dream, and as heartless as she is beautiful. She has a doll-like, pink-and-white face, big blue eyes, and a wealth of flaxen curls. Though she looks like an angel, a bigger devil in woman's form never lived."

"She was a great favourite with old Owen Courtney, the uncle, and his fond wish was that his favourite nephew should fall in love with and marry the pretty girl. But, bless you, the young man had ideas of his own."

"Young Mr. Courtney took to her a little at first, it must be confessed, but he soon wearied of her, while she grew more desperately in love with him than ever. She laid herself out to catch him in a way that even surprised the servants."

"She fairly took possession of him at the balls and parties given hereabouts, until at last he refused to attend them on that account. She waylaid him on the road if he took a canter on horseback. She wrote letters to him every day, until life became a burden to him."

"When he went away on a trip abroad, she would have followed him had she but known his destination. This he carefully kept from her."

"Then came the news of his betrothal to another girl whom he met on the steamer coming back. I shall never forget how wild Honor Morland was when she heard the rumour. She was never the same creature again. And when Mr. Courtney brought home his bride, the servants at Morland Castle told me that she raved like one mad for days at a time. Now you can see for yourself why I was surprised that she of all others had been invited to spend a fortnight here."

"No doubt she has got over her love by this time," laughed the girl, who bent diligently over her roses.

"I do not believe it," bluntly declared the other one. "Such women rarely ever love but once, and with them it is the love of a life-time. If they lose, their whole life is wrecked. They never forget, and they never forgive the woman who comes between them."

"Who else is coming?" was the next question.

"A lady and her two daughters. They used to be dead in love with Mr. Courtney, until they found it was useless. They were more sensible, however, than Honor Morland. They turned their attention elsewhere, and they are still looking for eligible husbands."

Then their conversation drifted into other channels, and after while they took up their baskets and wended their way toward the house, little dreaming that every word they had uttered had been heard by a motionless figure sitting on a mossy log on the other side of the laurel bushes.

Rhoda's heart throbbed wildly. Now she knew why her husband's face flashed at he mentioned the name of Honor Morland. And this was the young girl whom she was so soon to meet!

Rhoda felt nervous at the very thought of the ordeal before her. She knew she must be in the drawing-room to welcome his guests. Her husband would expect that of her.

Drying her tears, though her heart was heavy indeed, the young wife stole back quietly to the house, and up to her own room. When she had removed the traces of tears, she looked with pitiful wistfulness at the face which the mirror reflected.

How long would it take this Honor Morland, who loved her husband so madly, to discover that he was most unhappy in his marriage?

Rhoda grew terrified; her hands shook, and her face grew pale. There was a light tap on the door, and in answer to her "Come in" one of the maids entered the room.

"If you please, Mrs. Courtney, your husband would like to have you come down into the draw-

ing-room. He says the guests are likely to arrive at any moment."

"Say that I will be down directly," she replied, and her voice sounded so hoarse and unnatural that she feared the girl would notice her emotion.

"Would you like me to help you arrange your toilet, ma'am?" she asked, still holding the door-knob in her hand.

Her toilet! she had not thought of it, so deeply had she been engrossed in her thoughts. Yes, she must make every effort to look well, because the eyes of her rival would be upon her.

"Yes, you may help me, if you will," she said, wistfully. And when she was dressed and standing before her mirror, she was so nervous she could hardly stand. The maid noticed her trembling.

"You are ill, my lady," she cried, in alarm; "your face has grown very pale. Do let me bring you a glass of wine!"

"No," replied her young mistress; "it is only a momentary pain. I shall be better presently."

As the maid watched, Rhoda's face grew from deathly pale to a flushed appearance, and her hands were burning hot.

"I think I must go and get the housekeeper. I am sure Mrs. Courtney is not fit to receive guests. She is very ill," she said to herself.

"If you only felt as well as you look my lady," said the girl, aloud and admiringly.

"Do you think I look well, Ma'am?" she asked, with a pitiful eagerness in her voice.

"Oh, ma'am, if I dared speak the truth without being accused of flattery, I would say I never saw anyone so beautiful in all my life!"

"Do I look more beautiful than Honor Morland?" was the question that rose to her lips. But she checked the words just in time. At that moment another maid tapped at the door, and inquired if her mistress would soon be down.

"Yes," returned Rhoda. "I am coming directly."

As she uttered the words, she heard the sound of carriage-wheels. By a great effort, she nerved herself for the ordeal.

"Why, how foolish I am!" she said with a nervous little laugh. But somehow a premonition of coming evil crept over her which she could not shake off.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

OWEN COURTNEY did not look up as his young wife entered the room. He was gazing so steadily out of the window that he did not even hear her light footsteps. She went up to him timidly. Whatever she was about to say died away on her lips, for the expression on his face startled her. She had never seen him look so cross before.

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THE MOST EFFECTUAL ON EARTH.

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Box, 1s. 1/6, 2s. 9d., 4s. 6d.; extra strong, 11s. Sent free from observation by Dr. Davis, 309, Portobello Road, London, W., or order of any chemist.

Dr. Davis's little book for MARRIED WOMEN most invaluable, sent free on receipt of a stamped addressed envelope.

At that moment the servant announced; "Mrs. and the Misses Montague."

Owen stepped forward quickly to receive them. How his face lighted up! Was it only her fancy or did he hold the hand of the prettiest girl a moment longer than was necessary! Then he turned and introduced them to his young wife. Edith and Sophie Montague looked at her eagerly; she could see great surprise in their faces.

Were they disappointed in her! That was the first thought that crossed Rhoda's mind. How was she to know their thoughts! Sophie Montague came forward, holding out her hands and blushing like a school-girl. Edith stood back, gazing in puzzled wonder at the bride.

"We were very sorry that we could not be here to witness your home-coming and to participate in the grand wedding reception that every one is talking about even yet. But we were miles and miles away. But, dear me! you don't look a bit like your picture. I caught a glimpse of it once. I had asked Mr. Courtney the time, and as the case of his watch flew open, I beheld a young girl's picture. That was the first time we ever knew that Mr. Courtney had a sweetheart, and oh! what a surprise it was to us. But, dear me! you don't look a bit like your picture. I only caught a glimpse of it, but it is indelibly impressed upon my mind—a dark-eyed girl, with a wealth of dark hair piled high upon a shapely head, and oh! such a proud face. But I do not see that expression on yours. How is it, I wonder!"

Rhoda forced a smile to her lips. Although she had not seen the picture which this young girl referred to, yet she knew it must be the portrait of Nina. Once, not very long since, she had seen Owen standing out on the lawn, regarding his watch intently. She had supposed that he was lost in thought; now she knew what it meant, and her face crimsoned. How cruel that he should still carry the picture of Nina about with him when he was wedded to another!

"I was just thinking the same thing," chimed in Sophie. "You don't look at all like that picture, Mrs. Courtney."

The helpless young wife felt that she was called upon to say something.

"We do not always look like our pictures," she said; "but this is the first time I ever heard that a picture of me wore a proud expression."

Then the conversation drifted into other channels.

A few moments later two gentlemen arrived—Captain Edmunds and George Dalrymple. Rhoda remembered them well; they had been to the reception. The two girls were delighted at this acquisition to the party, and in a few moments Edith Montague had captured the dashing captain for a chat, leaving George Dalrymple, for her sister Sophie.

But Mr. Dalrymple was not in a mood to enjoy the senseless chatter of Miss Sophie Montague, for whom he inwardly felt a cordial dislike.

On the pretence of wishing to smoke a cigar, especially as her mother and Mrs. Courtney had joined the group, he begged her to excuse him for a little while. He saw his host on the terrace, and stepped out of the long French window, and went at once to where he stood.

"I congratulate you upon the rare beauty of your wife," he said, touching him familiarly upon the arm. "I thought her exceedingly pretty the first time I saw her; she has grown more beautiful since."

"I really ought to be obliged to you for the compliment," returned Owen, laughing.

"You ought to love her very much, for she is worth loving," said George Dalrymple, bluntly, as he knocked the ashes from his cigar.

"Has anyone told you that I do not?" asked Courtney quickly.

"No, certainly not; but she does not look happy," returned Dalrymple thoughtfully. "As a friend of many years' standing, I feel myself privileged to speak without reserve to you, my old comrade. Forgive me for saying that though your bride's eyes ought to be filled with sunshine, they are noticeably sad and dreary. Here is not a happy face, Owen."

Mr. Courtney frowned. He had heard quite enough of this topic. His wife's face did not interest him. George Dalrymple had been his friend

for long years; they had been chums from childhood. Suddenly Owen turned and laid his hand on Dalrymple's shoulder.

"I have a strange explanation to make to you," he said in a voice husky with emotion. "Your keen eyes have discovered, Dalrymple, what I would fain have kept from you. A full confession is good for the soul, they say, and I will tell you this much, George, the girl whom I loved, and whom I told you so much about, is not the one whom I have married. At the altar, in a dimly lighted church, this girl took the place of the one whom I was to wed, and I did not find it out until we had been pronounced man and wife."

Dalrymple could not have been more completely astounded if a volcano had opened at his feet. Owen had to repeat his words before Dalrymple could grasp the whole meaning of what he had heard.

"You must not think that I wronged her in any way, that she had any claim upon me," went on Owen, huskily. "Do not judge me too hastily. It all came about through a mistake. She—she—mistook me for Kenward Monk, my cousin, and hearing that I was to be married, came there, and—and, by the aid of a woman, succeeded in becoming my bride. And now, because of it, three lives are ruined. I am trying to make the best of it, but it seems, at times, as though I shall not be able to bear up under it—my whole heart belonging to one woman, while I am wedded to another."

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Dalrymple. "I did not dream of such a state of affairs!"

"She is my wife in name only," added Owen Courtney, bitterly. "I do not know what the future will bring forth. I can only say that I am trying to live it out as best I can. My life is full of wretchedness, and I cannot see what will be the end of it all."

Now George Dalrymple could readily understand the brooding look in Rhoda's eyes, why she was graver, more thoughtful, more abstracted than when he had seen her last.

While they were talking, another carriage drove up.

They saw a beautiful face at the window.

"It is Honor Morland," said Mr. Courtney.

Dalrymple looked surprised.

"I hope, my dear boy," he said in a tone of jest, beneath which was certainly a vein of earnestness, "that Miss Morland has got over her mad infatuation for you, now that she knows you are married!"

Mr. Courtney looked thoughtful.

(To be continued.)

AN Alaska traveller recently described some extraordinary phenomena connected with a small lake named Selawik, situated near the seacoast. Tides rise and fall in the lake, perhaps on account of an underground connection with the sea. At the bottom, he says, the water is salt, but on the top there is a layer of sweet water.

BERGER'S FOOD is one of the best known preparations in the market for the use of infants, invalids, and the aged, and has for very many years past been recommended by medical men all over the world. It is extremely easy to digest, and can be taken by sufferers from digestive and other complaints when no other food can be retained on the stomach. Berger's Food received the gold medal at the Health Exhibition held in London, 1894; the highest award at the Adelaide Exhibition, and a prize medal at Melbourne.

Messrs. ABRAHAM LYLE & SONS, LIMITED, the well-known sugar refiners, whose Golden Syrup and Pure Granulated Sugar, sold in cotton bags, should be given a trial by all housewives, have added to their list of specialties several kinds of pure confectionery. Their Golden Syrup Toffee, Vaporised Acid Tablets, and Vaporised Fruit Tablets are made from the best materials, and will be found a great improvement on the ordinary kinds of cheap sweets sold by grocers and low-class confectioners. These three specialties are however no more expensive than ordinary confectionery.

EPPS'S

EXTRACT FROM A LECTURE ON "FOODS AND THEIR VALUES," BY DR. ANDREW WILSON, F.R.S.E., etc.—
"If any motives—first, of due regard for health, and second, of getting full food-value for money expended—can be said to weigh with us in choosing our foods, then I say that Cocoa (Epps's being the most nutritious) should be made to replace tea and coffee without hesitation. Cocoa is a food; tea and coffee are not foods. This is the whole science of the matter in a nutshell, and he who runs may read the obvious moral of the story."

COCOA

LADIES' APIOL AND STEEL PILLS.

A FRENCH REMEDY FOR ALL IRREGULARITIES. Superseding Pennyroyal, Bitter Apple, and Pill Cochia. Price 4s. 6d. post-free. Obtainable only from MARTIN, Pharmaceutical Chemist, Southampton.

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Halfpenny
Sized up. Anti-
monies free.

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ALEX. ROSS' SKIN TIGHTENER OR TONIC.

The application of this to the face removes wrinkles and the crow's feet marks, giving a youthful appearance. 3s. 6d., sent secretly packed for 50 stamps.—62, Theobald's Road, London, W.C. Ear Machine, for outstanding ears, 10s. 6d., post, 11s.

NOSE MACHINE.

This is a contrivance by which the short cartilage of the nose is pressed into shape by wearing the instrument an hour daily for a short time. Price 10s. 6d., sent free for stamps.—ALEX. ROSS, 62, Theobald's Road, London, opposite Bedford Row. Established 1850. Parcel free from observation.

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in the World for Lashes, Eyebrows, and Hair on the Head, with Moustache and Beard. For Ladies' Hair and for all Colours. Had at 3s. 6d., post 3s. 9d., of ALEX. ROSS, 62, Theobald's Road, High Melbourne, London, W.C.

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FACETIÆ.

"IGNORANCE of the law excuses no man." "How about a woman?" "Same thing. Nothing but good looks will excuse woman."

"I CAN'T see why you object to young Sorbid, I'm sure he is constant." "Worse than that. He is perpetual."

LEAN and hungry tramp: "I hain't 'ad a bite all day, capt'n." Angler (intent on his sport): "Wrong bait, I expect. Try one of these worms."

WILL: "Jack's wife has insomnia." TOM: "Poor creature! That is hard on her!" WILL: "No; it is hard on Jack, for she is always awake when he comes in."

LIDDELL (shivering): "It's going to be cold. You had better get out your overcoat." ARDUP (flushing painfully): "I'll have to get my overcoat out first."

TALENTED BOY: "Papa, may I get my paints, and paint a picture?" PRACTICAL FATHER: "Not now, my son; but you may get some lime and whitewash the cellar."

EMPLOYER: "Where is the cashier?" OFFICE BOY: "He isn't in. His wife sent him word that the baby was asleep, and he's gone home to see what it looks like."

SHE: "See my new bonnet, dear! Isn't it a perfect love! And look how natural these flowers are!" HE (gloomily): "They are. I can almost see the dew upon them from here."

NELL: "Flora's going on the stage." BELLE: "I didn't know she had any talent." NELL: "She hasn't; but her aunt, the great actress, has died, and left Flora her wardrobe."

"As I understand it," said the struggling foreigner, "the word gent is merely a contraction for gentleman." "Then you don't understand it," answered the native.

"I AM so unfortunate," she said, delicately plaintive, "as to possess the gift of divining exactly what everyone thinks of me." He (absent-mindedly): "Well, that is unfortunate, by Jove!"

MISTRESS: "Bridget, I am tired of your carelessness. Only look at that dust on the furniture. It's six weeks' old, at the very least." BRIDGET: "Sure 'tis no fault o' mine. I've been here only three weeks."

EMPLOYER: "You were late this morning, Henry." OFFICE BOY: "Yes, sir." EMPLOYER: "Did you forget to mention it to me?" OFFICE BOY: "No, sir; but I didn't want to deprive you of the pleasure of being the first to speak of it."

MRS. HASHLY: "But why are you going to leave me, Mr. Firstfloor? I hope you've no fault to find with the table!" FIRSTFLOOR: "Oh, no; none at all. The table strikes me as being a most excellent piece of furniture."

BASS: "I suppose you think I'm a fool?" CASS: "That's what troubles me. If your supposition is correct, then you are a mind-reader, and therefore you cannot be a fool; and yet—well, you understand."

"DID you enjoy the musical last night?" "Very much, indeed, Mr. Blathwaite was there, and he kept me so amused with his funny stories that the programme was finished almost before I realised that it had begun."

OLD GENT: "Thomas, Thomas, when you tell a lie do you stop to think of the dozen other lies you may have to tell to get out of it?" THOMAS: "Course I does, sir, and I takes care to tell a lie in the first place as'll do for the whole dozen."

RICHFIELD: "What a perfect complexion Miss Beauty has!" RIVAL BELLS: "Yes. By the way she is with her brother to-night. Do you know him? He's a very prominent importer of drugs, chemicals, and toilet articles."

A BUSINESS WOMAN who evidently knows more about running an hotel than she knows about the English language, thus advertises: "This hotel will be kept by the widow of the former landlord Mr. Brown, who died last summer on a new and improved plan."

"I BOUGHT this currant cake here yesterday, and there were four dead flies on it," said Birdie McGinnis, putting the cake on the counter. "I am very sorry, miss, but if you will return the four flies I will give you four currants instead," replied the affable confectioner.

DAISY: "O mamma, may I pray for rain?" Mamma: "Certainly, pet. I'm very glad my little girl is sorry for the suffering caused by the drought." Daisy: "Oh, it isn't that, mamma; but Sophy Jones's picnic is tomorrow, and she hasn't asked me."

"ESMERALDA," he asked, "Would you love me if I were penniless?" She looked frightened and exclaimed: "Oh, Arthur; have you lost your fortune?" "No," he replied, "I merely wished to know if you would love me if I had no fortune." "Well," she answered, "since you put it that way, yes, I would!"

"DID you ever," asked the young husband, "have your wife look you in the eye when you came home and ask you if you had not forgotten something?" "Many a time, me boy," answered the old married man. "She does yet. In the early days it used to mean a kiss; now it is usually a reference to wiping my shoes."

"Are you fond of autographs, Mrs. Mushroom?" asked the æsthetic young lady of the practical visitor. "No, I don't think much of them; but my son, who's away at college, has a big collection of the handwriting of great celebrities. I reckon I'll surprise him some when he gets back this summer." "In what way?" "Well, ye see, some of them celebrities write such poor writin' that I had all the names copied off in a neat hand in a big book. You have no idea how much better they look. That other stuff that nobody couldn't make out, I just burned up."



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Medical Certificate sent with each Bottle.

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SOCIETY.

THE Empress of Russia is very fond of the Danish black or rye bread, such as is baked for the soldiers. During her Majesty's visits to Denmark she eats this kind of bread every day, and when at home a loaf is sent to Russia every fifth day.

THE Queen has given a commission to Professor von Angell, of Vienna, for a portrait of Prince Edward of York, which is to be added to her Majesty's large collection of works by that artist in the private apartments at Windsor Castle.

PRINCE FERDINAND OF BULGARIA, with Princess Marie Louise and Prince Boris, will pay a visit to the Tsar and Tsarina this month. The visit will be a momentous one, as it is the first visit of the Princess to the Imperial Court, and the first of her little son since his "conversion."

THE Queen-Regent of Holland wears the plainest possible clothes, but spends much time and thought on her daughter's toilets. Everything the young Queen Wilhelmina wears is of the most exquisite texture, and all the linen, fairy-like in fineness, has the "W" and Royal crown beautifully embroidered upon it.

THE Duke and Duchess of York are going to Copenhagen for the celebration of the eightieth birthday of King Christian. The Duke and Duchess are always welcome visitors at the Danish Court. It is, by the way, perhaps not generally known that the Duchess of York is nearly related to Queen Louise, the Duchess of Teck having been the latter's first cousin.

THE Empress Frederick will probably come to England at the end of April, directly after the return of the Court from the Riviera, and will stay at Windsor Castle with the Queen until her Majesty goes to Scotland at Whitsuntide. The Hereditary Princess of Saxe-Meiningen and her daughter, Princess Fédora, are to accompany the Empress to England.

PRINCESS ENA OF BATTENBERG and the Princess Leopold and Maurice, children of Princess Beatrice, are at the Riviera with the Queen, and are staying at the Villa Liseb, the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Cazalet, which has again been placed at her Majesty's disposal. The extensive, finely laid out, and well-shaded grounds of the Villa Liseb adjoin those of the Excelesior Regina Hotel, and the Queen usually takes an hour's airing in them every morning in her donkey-chair.

THIS season will be marked in the social world by the appearance of an interesting *débütante*, no less a person than the daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Connaught. One has so long been accustomed to think of the family of the Queen's soldier son as children that it comes as a positive surprise to find that Princess Margaret of Connaught has reached the "long frock" stage of existence. She is an excellent horse-woman, an ardent cyclist, and a good walker, but is of a less lively disposition than most of her English cousins.

THE Casarewitch it may not be generally known, is highly gifted intellectually, and, like most Russians, is a splendid linguist. He is passionately devoted to the navy and the profession of which he once promised to become such a valuable ornament. His chief occupation is the translation of foreign works bearing upon marine subjects, some being of the most technical character, as, for instance, on boilers for warships and kindred heavy subjects. These works are published at his own expense, and distributed throughout the navy. In this labour he is ably assisted by his fellow-sufferer in his Casarewitch retreat, the Grand Duke Alexander, his young brother-in-law, husband of his sister Xenia.

THE Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse have left Darmstadt for some months. The Grand Duke Ernest has gone on a tour through Italy, after which he will proceed to St. Petersburg on a visit to the Emperor and Empress of Russia. The Grand Duchess is to visit the Hereditary Prince and Princess of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen at Strassburg and the Duchess of Coburg at Gotha before going to Nice.

STATISTICS.

THE manufacture of sugar and salt is carried on by the aid of 2,401 inventions.

THE public buildings of England are valued at £240,000,000.

THE total number of umbrellas left in London cabs for one year, according to a report just issued, is 17,000.

IT is estimated that the amount of water precipitated on this globe annually in the form of rain, snow, etc., is 29,000 cubic miles.

NEARLY 200 patents have been issued for horse-shoes, but not one of the inventions has ever come into general use.

PARIS has 6,000 policemen. New York has 3,800 policemen. The ordinary arrests in New York are 85,000, in Paris 100,000, and in London 150,000.

GEMS.

THE utility of life is not in its extent; it is in the employment of it. A man may live long and live little.

THE poor are our friends; and, according to the Spanish proverb, "When a friend saith, there is no to-morrow."

BROODING over trouble is like surrounding one's self with a fog; it magnifies all the objects seen through it. Occupation of the mind prevents this.

A great deal of the unhappiness, and much of the vice of the world, is owing to weakness and indecision of purpose—in other words to lack of courage.

As a general thing it is the wiser plan to conform to a custom if there is no really good reason for rejecting it, thus avoiding singularity where it is not needful.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BUTTER SCOTCH.—One cup brown sugar, half a cup of water, a piece of butter the size of an egg, and one teaspoonful of vinegar. Boil about twenty minutes and flavour if desired.

COLD WATER CAKE.—One cup of sugar, two eggs, one-half cup of butter, one-half cup of cold water, two cups of flour, and two teaspoonfuls of yeast powder. Flavoured with lemon it is very nice, although vanilla is liked by some in it. The real success of this cake depends upon the beating, as, indeed, does the success of nearly every cake.

CUSTARD FRITTERS.—Half a pint of milk, five eggs, half a cup of sugar, one gill of cream. Beat milk, cream, sugar and eggs together, strain, put into a small bowl, set in saucepan, with boiling water to reach half way up the sides of the bowl. Steam gently until set, about twenty minutes. Place on ice until cold. Cut into pieces about one and a half inches long by one square; dip in batter and fry in plenty of hot lard until a deep fawn colour. Serve sprinkled with sugar.

CREAMED OYSTERS.—Procure a pint of medium-sized oysters, remove the oysters with a fork from their liquor into a small saucepan, add half teaspoonful salt, quarter teaspoonful pepper, strain the liquor and add half cup of the liquor to the oysters, and half cup of milk; mix half table-spoonful of butter with half table-spoonful of flour to paste; place the saucepan over the fire, and when it begins to boil add the butter and flour. Stir and cook till the oysters begin to ruffle, which will take about two minutes' cooking. Remove saucepan; serve either over toast or with crackers.

MISCELLANEOUS.

AN electric flame has been created of sufficiently intense heat to melt a diamond.

THE street cars in Swedish cities rarely stop for passengers. Men and women there are quite agile and expert in jumping on and off while the cars are in motion.

ELECTRO MAGNETS, capable of picking up five tons, are used by an Illinois steel company to transfer steel beams or plates from one part of the shop to another.

EVERY guest at a Norwegian wedding brings the bride a present. In many parts a keg of butter is the usual gift, and if the marriage takes place in winter salted or frozen meat is offered.

PRINCESS HENRY OF PRUSSIA and her children are to visit the Queen in May, and will probably accompany her Majesty on her spring visit to Balmoral.

If an express train, moving at the rate of 45 miles an hour, were to stop suddenly, it would give the passengers a shock equal to that of falling from a height of 54 ft.

THE average cost of men-of-war in Nelson's time was only £66,000 for a large 100-gun ship. The *Magnificent*, one of the latest and finest at present in the British Navy, cost £900,000.

ALTHOUGH Rome is called "the eternal city," the name by right belongs to the city of Damascus, in Syria, which is the oldest city in the world. As long as man has written records the city of Damascus has been known.

ALL restaurant knives in Austria-Hungary are blunted, according to law, to prevent the convivial revellers who "use the house" from murdering one another when quarrelling "in their cups."

GOLD was known much earlier than silver, and was at first the cheaper of the two metals; but the price of silver was lowered by the discovery of silver mines in Silesia, in Spain, and in Laurium.

ECLIPSES of the sun in China are treated as a warning from Heaven that the reigning prince has been wanting in wisdom and morality. The present emperor declares that "he is filled with great fear in anticipation of the coming eclipse of the sun on the 22nd inst."

THERE are more ants to the square mile in Florida than in any other country in the world. There are ants that measure more than half an inch in length, and then there are ants so small that they can scarcely be seen to move with the unaided eye.

A REGULAR fabric, which may find a use for many purposes, is made in Brussels. It is flexible, transparent and impervious to water. This textile material can be washed off with cold water, like a glass pane, by means of a sponge, and is mainly to be used for portières, window shades, umbrellas, et cetera. The patented process for the production of this tissue consists in filling the meshes of a wide-meshed fabric, such as muslin, with chrome gelatine or with a similar material, and then rendering the chrome gelatine insoluble by exposure to light. The fabric is then coated on both sides with hotted oil or fat varnish; the treatment with chrome gelatine and linseed oil is repeated several times, and the fabric is ornamented by printing.

AMONG the hills of old Berkshire is a noble birch tree, gigantic in trunk and limb and abundant in foliage, which towers above its neighbouring companions, but grows, apparently, out of an immense granite boulder. Here one might think it would have paused, submitting to the adamantine pressure, either crushed utterly to the earth or dwarfed and deformed by its unyielding environment. But it had the irresistible evolutionary forces of nature behind it. The sunlight above wooed it from its prison house; it pushed upwards toward the light. Gradually the little crevice in the rock was widened, the great boulder was split asunder as by the hammer of Thor—the noble tree was scarcely distorted by the struggle, protected from destructive storms by its conquered enemy.

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ERUPTIONS, PIMPLES
ENTIRELY FADEN AWAY.

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Are effective and require
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NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

A. B.—All the children share equally.
B. B.—Hull is a city and county of itself.
JACKY.—Liverpool is the largest city in England.
HAROLD.—Shaving is the best moustache cultivator.
FANNY.—No; shadings remain with us during the winter.
WOMAN.—This marriage would hold good in England.
DULX.—Remember always to sweep with the pile, and not against it.
IS DUREN.—We could not offer you any advice; it is purely a case for a medical man.
G. V.—The great naval Powers of Europe are, in order, England, France, and Italy.
ANDREW.—A reporter for a newspaper should be a man of sound education, and possess extensive general knowledge.
HARR.—Wait a year if you must go, till proper commutation is opened up, and there will be a ready road out and back.
A MARTIN.—We could not possibly think of offering advice in a case which is at present in the hands of a regular medical man.
FABIA.—Othello when brought in, should be separated, and folded at once; if allowed to lie together, many wrinkles accumulate.
A. C.—It would be necessary for you to be attested to the profession of civil engineer and surveyor to acquire a sound knowledge of them.
NATH.—We are really not in as good a position as you seem to say what kind of present might be likely to suit an individual whom you know, but we are ignorant of it.
G. V.—The technicalities are so numerous, and the execution and attestation so formal, that only an experienced lawyer can see that they are all properly observed.
GRACE.—The simplest and best way we should think would be by means of massage. There are many advertised methods, but we cannot answer for their efficacy or safety.
GEORGINA.—We fear you cannot do more than run warm water through it, which will probably take out the red; if you take it to a professional cleaner something might be done.
ALFRED.—Pay gravel is the gritty sand from rivers containing small quantities of gold washed down from the reefs higher up; the miner washes along the gravel, and catches the gold in his sieve.
G. C.—The Earl of Life was made a duke posthumously to his marriage with the daughter of the Prince of Wales; the title could not descend to him, because it had not previously existed in his family.
LATER.—Kissing under the mistletoe is a custom more honored in the breach than in the observance, but we think it is permissible, as you put it, the moment the mistletoe is hung up in the house.

VANESSA.—The parties are bound in honour and courtesy to reply and send back your testimonials, they may choose to act discourteously and dishonourably if they like, and in that event you are helpless.

S. N.—Although the duke is a royalty, his wife was not being ceremonially married to him, therefore not taking his rank; hence though his children are legitimate, they follow the rank of their mother.

A. W.—You must rub it down with a hard smooth piece of sandstone and plenty of water, with the finest sand after that, then with pumice powder and some woollen stuff on a stick moistened occasionally with water till you get off the gloss.

TIME.

SWIFTLY rolls Time's changeable tide,
Rearing on its troubled breast
Thought of peace, and thought of rest,
Hopes, and fears, and griefs, and joys,
Glittering treasures, golden toys;
All the bitterness of life,
Hated, care, and toil, and strife;
On its treacherous bosom glide,
In its murmuring wavelets hide.

Listen to the howling wind;
Tempestuous storms sweep o'er it now,
And chill, ah! many a weary brow,
Faith's pale light but faintly gleams,
Earthly struggles, earthly dreams,
Lure poor wanderers away
From the peaceful, holy way;
Ignorant and weak, and blind,
They seek the rest they cannot find.

Onward still with solemn roar,
Must its turbulent waters flow,
Must its dreamers with it go.
But an awful day draws nigh,
When the mighty power will die,
The Angel of the Lord will stand
Upon the banks of golden sand
And ringing loud, from shore to shore,
Will come the sentence, "Time shall be no more!"

A. V.—The inside must be thoroughly cleaned when this is done put as much tin as you think will properly cover the surface with sal ammoniac, set it on the fire till the two melt together; when that takes place move the vessel steadily about till the entire vessel is tinued.

SCARIC.—Travellers who claim to have seen such performances declare that they do occur precisely as stated. The man is put through some preparatory treatment, is then brought under some form of hypnotic influence, and falls into a comatose or hibernating state.

HOUSEWIFE.—Wash once a month, or once in two weeks; if much used, with skim milk and water, equal parts; rub once in three months well with boiled linseed oil. Put on very little, rub in well with a rag, and polish with a piece of old silk, flannel is next best to silk. Never scrub, never use brush or soap or water that is not on a cloth.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—The Morgue, in Paris, is a deadhouse. It is a place in which the bodies of persons who have met with accidents, or who have been drowned in the Seine, are deposited, and remain for three days. They are laid on inclined slabs, and the public are admitted with a view to recognition. If not claimed they are buried at the public expense.

G. D.—The law does not consider it necessary that anyone should find a dog; the animal can always care for itself; therefore the protection which the so-called finder extends to it is regarded as gratuitous; it follows, then, in law that you are not entitled to repayment of any money you have spent upon, or on account of the animal which has now been reclaimed by its owner.

N. S.—Taking two parts of boiling oil and one part of gold size, put both in a bottle and shake till well amalgamated, then with a piece of flannel dipped in the mixture from time to time, and well saturated, rub well along the whole length, so that the dressing may thoroughly penetrate, then hang it in the air to dry; after you have used it a few times you should repeat the process and apply at longer intervals when it appears to require a fresh dressing.

UNHAPPY FLORENCE.—Under such circumstances, lover-like attentions or demonstrations from any other person are a distinct breach of faith, and deserve the severest reprimand. In your own case the wonder is how you can love a man for whom you can have no respect, for surely you could not respect any one who deliberately deceived you. There are but two things for you to do, and between these you will do well to choose at once. Either take him as he is, or make up your mind to give him up entirely.

TROUBLED.—We would like to help you, but do not feel that it would be safe to offer any prescription, though we can give you some general hints. The eye-sight is too precious, and it is too delicate a part of the anatomy to be tampered with, except by a professional. Indeed, many physicians will refuse to treat ailments of the eye, and will recommend one to a specialist on eye troubles. You may, however, proceed as follows with perfect safety we believe; frequent bathing of the eyes in warm water will be found very beneficial, milk and water warmed is also very good, a tablespoonful of salt in a half gallon of tepid water is good also. Place the face in the water and open the eyes underneath, do this at least once a day, always use fresh salt and water each day.

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A DOCTOR'S OPINION.

Twylford, Berks.

March 21st, 1898.

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Dr. GORDON STAPLES, R.N.

A NURSE'S OPINION.

5 Patahull Road,

Kentish Town, N.W.

Dear Sirs,

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L. POLLARD.

Late Nurse of the R.N.S. and other Hospitals.



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